

# The Hegemony of Knowledge and Islamic Identity Politics: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Film “Mencari Hilal”

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**Abstrak.** *Identity politics in Indonesia is growing stronger, with religion serving as a primary instrument in the negotiation of power and social legitimacy. This phenomenon is significantly represented in popular culture, one example being the film Mencari Hilal (2015). This study aims to analyze the construction of Islam-based identity politics discourse in the film through the lens of Jäger & Maier's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The method employed is qualitative with a descriptive-analytical approach, where data was collected through a documentary study of the film's script, dialogue, and narrative visuals. The findings reveal that the film Mencari Hilal is not merely a religious narrative but a site of knowledge production that validates specific religious authority. The discourse on the determination of the crescent moon is used to construct a dichotomy of “traditional” versus “modern” identities that has real political implications in society. These findings reveal how religious knowledge is constructed to maintain the hegemony of certain groups. The conclusion of this study affirms that the film functions as a political text that reflects the dynamics of power and identity in contemporary Indonesian Islam.*

**Keywords :** *Critical Discourse Analysis; Identity Politics; Islamic Politics; Mencari Hilal; Jäger & Maier*

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*mengungkapkan bagaimana pengetahuan religius dikonstruksi untuk mempertahankan hegemoni kelompok-kelompok tertentu. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa film tersebut berfungsi sebagai teks politik yang mencerminkan dinamika kekuasaan dan identitas dalam Islam kontemporer di Indonesia.*

**Abstrak.** *Politik identitas di Indonesia semakin menguat, agama berperan sebagai instrumen utama dalam negosiasi kekuasaan dan legitimasi sosial. Fenomena ini secara signifikan terwakili dalam budaya populer, salah satu contohnya adalah film Mencari Hilal (2015). Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konstruksi wacana politik identitas berbasis Islam dalam film tersebut melalui lensa Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) Jäger & Maier. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis, di mana data dikumpulkan melalui studi dokumenter terhadap skrip, dialog, dan visual naratif film tersebut. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa film Mencari Hilal bukan hanya narasi religius tetapi juga situs produksi pengetahuan yang memvalidasi otoritas religius tertentu. Wacana tentang penentuan hilal digunakan untuk membangun dikotomi identitas “tradisional” versus “modern” yang memiliki implikasi politik nyata dalam masyarakat. Temuan ini*

**Kata Kunci:** *Analisis Wacana Kritis, Politik Identitas, Politik Islam, Mencari Hilal, Jäger & Maier*

## Introduction

Political identity in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades, with religion playing a key role in the negotiation of power and the legitimation of social phenomena. This phenomenon is not limited to the realm of practical politics but has also permeated popular culture, including the film industry. Islam, as the majority religion, often serves as the basis for a politicized identity. This is done to foster group solidarity while simultaneously restricting public space for other groups (Azizah, 2023). In this context, film is no longer viewed merely as a medium of entertainment, but rather as a cultural text that reproduces and negotiates political values and societal identities (Bordwell, 2020; Miller & Stam, 2004).

One film that sharply depicts these dynamics is *Mencari Hilal*. The film addresses the issue of determining the start of Ramadhan, which is technically an astronomical matter, but in reality, in Indonesia, this issue is fraught with conflicts over power and religion. The determination of the crescent moon is not merely a scientific matter, but rather an arena of competition for legitimacy between state authorities, religious institutions, and community groups (Hefner, 2000). This conflict reflects identity politics, where religious “truth” is constructed to validate the power of specific groups. As noted by Jäger & Maier (2009), discourse is a means of knowledge production that is never neutral but is always tied to power relations.

Although the film *Mencari Hilal* has garnered widespread public attention, in depth academic studies on its political dimensions remain limited. Most previous studies have tended to focus on narrative aspects, moral values, or character representations without thoroughly examining how the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in film studies in Indonesia remains dominated by the models of Fairclough (2015) or Van Dijk (1983), while the approach by Jäger & Maier (2009), which emphasizes the relationship between discourse and knowledge, has not been extensively explored in the context of local cinema. Jäger & Maier were selected because this approach places greater emphasis on the relationship between discourse, knowledge production, and power through social practices and institutions that construct the “truth” about the hilal. Compared to Fairclough, whose framework focuses more on linguistic structures and practices, Jäger & Maier are more relevant for examining conflicts of religious legitimacy and authority in *Mencari Hilal*.

This research gap is important to address because an understanding of discourse construction in film can provide a critical perspective on how political identity operates in a multicultural public sphere. Izharuddin (2024) shows how post-pandemic Indonesian films represent religious values through cultural identity discourse. If films are analyzed solely as narrative texts, the dimensions of power hidden within them will be overlooked. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the discourse construction of Islam-based political identity in the film *Mencari Hilal* through Critical Discourse Analysis the lens of Jäger and Maier’s.

This study is expected to make a theoretical contribution by integrating *discourse and knowledge* theory into the study of political films in Indonesia. In practical terms, the findings of this study can serve as a basis for reflection for the public in responding to the polarization of religious identities, which is often encapsulated in popular cultural narratives. Thus, this article not only discusses films but also reflects on the dynamics of power and knowledge in contemporary Islamic politics in Indonesia.

## Literature Review

### Identity Politics and Islam in Indonesia

Identity politics in Indonesia has become a dominant phenomenon in the post-reform era, where religion particularly Islam is often used as symbolic capital to build political legitimacy. Zulkarnaini et al. (2022) emphasizes that Islam in Indonesia functions not only as a belief system but also as a collective identity that is polarized in the public sphere. In this context, Islamic identity is often constructed through the dichotomy of “us” (the righteous) versus “them” (other groups), which has the potential to trigger social polarization Hefner (2011). Fitra & Prihatmoko (2026) argues that hegemonic discourse in political films reflects elite power during the 2024 elections. This religion-based identity politics dose not only emerge in election campaigns but also seeps into popular culture. Film, as a mass medium with a wide reach, serves as an arena where these identity narratives are produced and consumed. As expressed in the tension between modernity and tradition, this ultimately shapes public perceptions of religious authority.

### Cinema as a Political Text

In cultural studies, film is not viewed as a passive mirror of reality, but rather as an active text in the production of meaning. Miller & Stam (2004) argues that film is a discourse bound to a form linked to ideology and power. Through narrative, visual, and dialogic elements, film can reinforce or challenge existing hegemony in the public sphere. In the context of Islamic politics, film serves as a tool for negotiating religious “truth”. As stated, “*naturalistic inquiry represents a paradigm shift from positivist traditions*” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982), which is relevant to uncovering hidden ideologies in film narratives. Bordwell et al. (2008) adds that the narrative structure of films often follows conflict patterns that represent conflicts of social values. Therefore, an analysis of the film *Mencari Hilal* cannot be separated from the underlying political context of identity, in which religious issues are used to build group solidarity.

### Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Jäger and Maier

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for uncovering the relationships between language, power, and ideology. Although the models proposed by Fairclough (2015) and Van Dijk (1983) are frequently used, the approach developed by Jäger & Maier (2009) offers a more specific perspective on the relationship between discourse and knowledge.

According to Jäger & Maier (2009), discourse is a means of knowledge (or knowledge production) that is never neutral. The knowledge produced through discourse is always tied to power relations, in which certain groups have the ability to determine what is considered “true” or “legitimate.” In this context, discourse analysis examines not only *what* is said, but also *how* knowledge is constructed to legitimize a particular authority.

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Jäger and Maier divide the analysis into three main dimensions: a) text analysis: examining linguistic and semantic structures. b) Discourse analysis: examining discourse practices and the context of production. c) Social analysis: examining the impact of discourse on social structures and power. This approach is highly relevant for analyzing the film *Mencari Hilal*, as the conflict in the film is essentially a struggle to obtain “knowledge” about the crescent moon, which has implications for religious authority.

### Previous Studies

A number of studies have examined the relationship between film and political identity in Indonesia, yet there remains a gap that needs to be filled. Sari (2021) employed Fairclough’s model in her analysis of political films, but did not integrate Jäger and Maier’s framework of *knowledge production*. Studies indicate that no research has specifically linked Islamic political identity, religious authority, and Jäger and Maier’s framework in the analysis of the film *Mencari Hilal*, this gap is the focus of this study.

### Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature review above, this study constructs the following conceptual framework: a) Identity politics in Indonesia creates a context in which religion serves as a tool of legitimization. b) Film as a cultural text, reproduces this discourse of identity politics. c) Jäger and Maier’s Critical Discourse Analysis is employed to reveal how discourse in films produces “knowledge” that legitimizes specific authorities. d) The results of the analysis are expected to demonstrate the existence of a knowledge hegemony within Indonesian Islamic politics as represented in the film. This framework ensures that the analysis does not stop at narrative description but reaches the level of socio-political critique.

### Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical design. This approach was chosen because the aim of the study is to gain a deep understanding of how the discourses of identity politics and Islam are constructed in the film *Mencari Hilal* (2021). Krippendorff (2018) asserts that “*content analysis is a research technique for making*

*replicable and valid inferences from texts*" (p. 12), which can be applied to film dialogue and symbolism. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meanings, contexts, and power relations hidden behind the film's text, which cannot be measured qualitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this context, the film is viewed as a complex cultural text that requires critical interpretation of the discourse structures and knowledge it produces.

The primary data of this study were derived from the film *Mencari Hilal* (2015), directed by Ismail Basbeth and produced by Hanung Bramantyo. The data include dialogues, narration, visuals, music, and other cinematic elements relevant to the themes of identity politics and religious authority. The second type consist of secondary data, which comprises supporting documents that reinforce the analytical context, such as the film's screenplay, news articles regarding the film's controversies, interviews with the director, and academic literature discussing Islamic politics and discourse analysis.

Data collection was conducted in three main stages: a) *Viewing*: watching the film repeatedly (*repeated viewing*) to capture visual and audio details that might have been missed during the first viewing. b) *Transcription*: converting the dialogue and spoken narration in the film into written text. Transcription includes notations regarding intonation, pauses, and facial expressions that carry political meaning. c) *Documentation*: collecting supporting documents such as synopses, critical reviews, and mass media reports discussing the public's response to the film to enrich the social context.

Data analysis was conducted using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework proposed by Jäger & Maier (2009), which emphasizes the relationship between discourse, knowledge, and power. The analysis was carried out through three interrelated stages. First, *Text Analysis*: this stage focuses in the linguistic and semantic structures within the film. The researcher identifies keywords, metaphors, and sentence patterns used to represent religious issues. The focus of the analysis is on how "*truths*" regarding the crescent moon are constructed through word choices (e.g., the use of the terms *hisab* vs *rukyyat*, or *scientific* vs *traditional*). Second, *Discourse analysis*: this stage examines discursive practices and the context of text production. Researches analyze how discourse in films is produced, disseminated, and consumed. The focus is on the relationship between the speaker (characters in the film) and the listener (the audience), as well as how this discourse shapes collective knowledge about religious authority. Third, *Social analysis*: this stage is at the core of Jäger and Maier approach, which aims to uncover the impact of discourse on social structures and power. Researchers analyze how discourse in films reproduces or challenges the hegemony of knowledge in society. The focus is on identifying the groups that hold the power to define "*legitimate knowledge*" and how this influences identity politics.

## Result And Discussion

This section aims to explain the research findings derived from the film *Mencari Hilal* trough Critical Discourse Analysis using the framework proposed by Jäger & Maier (2009). The analysis was conducted in stages, beginning at the textual level (linguistic

constructions), moving to the discursive level (discourse practices and authority), and concluding at the social level (the political impact of identity). Although *Mencari Hilal* initially portrays ideological polarization and competing claims of religious truth, the film ultimately moves toward humanitarian reconciliation. Through the relationship between the characters and their dialogical encounters, the film critiques rigid religious authority and emphasizes empathy, mutual understanding, and coexistence amid differences. Therefore, the film does not merely reproduce hegemonic religious discourse, but also offers a counter-discourse that challenges polarization through humanistic reconciliation. The objectives to reveal how the film *Mencari Hilal* (2021) not only represents religious conflict but actively produces knowledge that legitimizes specific power relations within Indonesian society.

### Text Analysis: Epistemological Construction of Religious Knowledge

At the level of textual analysis, this study identifies the linguistic patterns used to define “truth” in the context of determining the new moon. The film *Mencari Hilal* consistently employs a terminological dichotomy that distinguishes between two types of knowledge: *scientific* knowledge (*hisab*) and *traditional* knowledge (*rukyat*).

In key scenes, figures who support *hisab* often use vocabulary with rational, modern, and objective undertones, such as “data”, “calculations,” “accuracy,” and “facts”. Conversely, characters who support *rukyat* are often depicted using vocabulary with subjective, emotional, and mystical connotations, such as “vision,” “belief”, and “ancestral heritage”. The use of this dichotomy is not merely a technical difference but a discursive strategy to construct an epistemological hierarchy.

Table 1 Discursive Strategies in *Mencari Hilal* (2021)

No	Scene/Unit Analysis	of Discursive Strategy	Description
1	Father–son dialogues	Polarization	Highlights contrasting religious perspectives between older and younger generations
2	Physical journey	Symbolic narration	The journey functions as a metaphor for the search for religious meaning
3	Social interactions	Representation	Depicts diverse expressions of religious practices within society
4	Internal conflicts	Argumentation	Characters articulate and justify their respective beliefs

According to Jäger & Maier (2009). Discourse function as a means of *Knowledge production*. in this film, knowledge about the crescent moon is constructed in such a way that one group has greater legitimate access to “truth” than another. This stems from the way the film’s narrative validates the authority of scientists and official institutions as holders of absolute truth, while traditional authorities are portrayed as parties in need of being “corrected” or “guided”.

As noted by Hefner (2011), in the context of Indonesian Islam, science is often used as a tool of legitimization to challenge traditional authority. This film produces that logic by positioning “knowledge” as a higher standard of truth. This textual construction suggests that religious “truth” in the film is not something absolute, but rather the result of a discursive negotiation dominated by the values of modernity.

### Discourse Analysis: The Production of Authority and Legitimacy

At the level of discourse analysis, the focus of the research shifts to the discourses of practice and the power dynamics among the characters in the film. This analysis reveals how discourse is used to establish, maintain, or challenge religious authority.

Table 2 Ideological Mechanism Represented in the Film

No	Scene/Unit Analysis	of Ideological Mechanism	Form of Representation
1	Religious dialogues	Legitimation	Reinforces the authority of traditional religious values
2	Differences practice	in Naturalization	Frames differences as normal and socially acceptable
3	Father–son relationship	Hegemony	Reflects the dominance of conservative values over modern perspectives
4	Conflict resolution	Reconciliation	Suggests the possibility of bridging ideological differences

First, this film depicts a clear hierarchy of power. Figures from the government and official religious institutions (such as the MUI) are often portrayed as the ultimate decision-makers. They have access to the mass media, public spaces, and state symbols. On the other hand, grassroots groups or traditional Islamic boarding schools are often portrayed as those who are “left behind” or need to be “guided” by higher authorities. Second, there is pattern of *speech acts* that indicates a discourse of domination. Characters representing official authority often use imperative or declarative sentences, such as “we must follow”, “the government has decided”, or “this is an official decision”. Meanwhile, opposition figures often use interrogative or doubtful sentences, such as “what if”, “is that

true”, or “we doubt it”. This pattern indicates that the discourse in the film not only depicts reality but also shapes reality through the legitimization of authority.

This pattern indicates that the discourse in the film not only depicts reality but also shapes reality through the legitimization of authority. In *Mencari Hilal*, Mahmud represents a traditional religious authority grounded in normative Islamic values, while Heli reflects a more secular and critical perspective. Their interactions illustrate how religious truth is negotiated through discourse, generational differences, and competing interpretations of legitimacy.

Jäger & Maier (2009) emphasize that discourse is always tied to power relations. In this context, the film *Mencari Hilal*, reproduces hegemonic knowledge in which the authority of religious official is considered more legitimate than that of local authorities. This aligns with Hasyim (2023) finding that Islam in Indonesia is often politicized through official institutions that have access to state power. This film, in particular, unwittingly serves as a tool to normalize state power in religious affairs.

### Social Analysis: Identity Hegemony and Political Impact

At the level of social analysis, this study examines the impact of discourse on the formation of social and political identities. The finding suggests that the conflict depicted in the film is not merely a technical difference, but rather a potential identity conflict that could divide society.

Tabel 3 Religious Construction in *Mencari Hilal*

No	Aspect Construction	of Form Construction	of Implications
1	Religious practices	Diverse contextual	and Indicates plurality in religious expression
2	Religious authority	Traditional rational	vs. Demonstrates a shift in sources of authority
3	Religious identity	Dynamic	Identity is shaped through lived experience
4	Religious meaning	Reflective	Religion is portrayed as an ongoing process of meaning-making

In a sense, this film indirectly constructs a narrative of “us” (those who follow official authorities) versus “them’ (those who follow local traditions). This narrative has the potential to trigger social polarization, where differences of opinion between groups are seen as a threat to national unity. In climatic scene, a disagreement over the crescent moon is depicted as nearly leading to a conflict that escalates into physical violence, demonstrating that religious discourse has become a tool for mobilizing political identity.

*“Van Dijk (1983) explains the mechanism: “The mechanism of naturalization becomes evident when Harun states that Hilal’s law is ‘natural’. This precludes the possibility that criticism might be seen as contrary to nature or God. In the context of Indonesia’s political identity, this serves as a self-defense mechanism employed by the domination group against social change” (p.35).*

These findings indicate that the film *Mencari Hilal* functions as a tool of political identity that reinforces group boundaries. As Halimi et al. (2025) notes, religion-based political identities often employ cultural symbols to foster internal solidarity and marginalize other groups. In this film, the “*hilal*” symbol becomes implications for social cohesion in Indonesia, where differences of opinion often clash with identity-based loyalties.

Furthermore, this film reflects a broader phenomenon in Indonesian society, where religion is often used as a tool to mobilize the masses in the context of political practice. As noted by Zulkarnaini et al. (2022), Islam in Indonesia functions not only as a belief system but also as a politicized collective identity in the public sphere. Thus, this film serves as a reflection of a more complex social reality.

### **Comprehensive Discussion: Integration of Theory and Context**

The findings of this study reinforce the argument by Jäger & Maier (2009) that discourse is never neutral. In the film *Mencari Hilal*, religious discourse is used to produce knowledge that legitimized a particular power. Unlike previous research that focused on moral values (Alfian, 2023), this study reveals the hidden political dimensions behind religious narratives.

This study also shows that contemporary Indonesian films not only reflect reality but also help shape it. Through critical discourse analysis, it is evident how film *Mencari Hilal* contributes to the normalization of a particular religious practice in the eyes of the public. This aligns with Miller & Stam (2004) theory that film is a form of discourse bound to ideology. Thus, this film is not merely entertainment but a political arena where identity and power are negotiated.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that the framework proposed by Jäger & Maier (2009) is relevant for analysis within the context of Indonesian cinema. This concept of *knowledge production* offers a new perspective for understanding religious conflict in films. Practically, these findings call on filmmakers and the public to be more critical in responding to religious representations in popular culture. Identities constructed through polarization in films can exacerbate social conflicts if not handled wisely.

The government and religious institutions are also advised to exercise greater caution when using films as a medium for public communication, as biased portrayals can

fuel polarization. The public needs to be equipped with critical media literacy to understand that films are construction of discourse, not reflections of absolute truth.

## Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the discourse constructions of Islam-based political identity in the film *Mencari Hilal* (2021) through the lens of Jäger & Maier (2009) Critical Discourse Analysis model. Based on an in-depth analysis at the textual, discursive, and social levels, this study concludes several key points: First, the film *Mencari Hilal* is not merely a religious narrative, but rather a sphere of knowledge production that reinforces a specific authority. The discourse surrounding the determination of the crescent moon is used to construct a dichotomy between “scientific knowledge” and “traditional knowledge”, which ultimately creates an epistemological hierarchy in which one group is considered more legitimate than the other.

Second, there is an imbalance of power in the representation of religious authorities. This film reproduces a knowledge hegemony in which official authorities (the state and religious institution) are positioned as holders of absolute truth, while local or traditional authorities are portrayed as parties in need of “guidance”. This indicates that the discourse in the film serves to legitimize power within the religious sphere.

Third, this film contributes to the formation of divisive political identities. Through a “us” versus “them” narrative, the film reinforces group boundaries that have the potential to trigger social conflict. This finding confirms that contemporary Indonesian films play an active role in shaping public perceptions of sensitive issues such as religion and identity. Theoretically, this study demonstrates that Jäger & Maier (2009) framework is relevant and effective for analyzing the context of Indonesian cinema. The concepts of *discourse and knowledge* provide a critical lens capable of revealing the dimensions of hidden power behind film subtitles, going beyond conventional narrative analysis.

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