

A SAUSSUREAN SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL AND VERBAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACIAL IDENTITY IN SPIKE LEE'S *BLACKKLANSMAN* (2018)

Dendy Abyaz Rusmawan^a, Irman Nurhapitudin^b, R. Myrna Nur Sakinah^c

dendy.abyz02@gmail.com, irmannurhapitudin@uinsgd.ac.id, myrnanursakinah@uinsgd.ac.id

^{a b c} UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia.

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ABSTRACT

*This study examines the construction of racial identity in Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman* (2018) through Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. While previous studies have primarily focused on discourse, language, or the thematic portrayal of racism, this research investigates how verbal and visual signs work together to construct meanings of white supremacy and Black identity. Employing a qualitative approach, the study analyzes 20 scenes selected based on the research criteria, consisting of verbal and visual representations, using Saussure's concepts of the signifier and the signified. Data were collected through repeated viewing, scene segmentation, documentation, and note-taking, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that verbal and visual signifiers collectively construct racial identity by representing white supremacy, institutional racism, Black identity, and resistance. The study concludes that *BlackKkKlansman* functions as a cultural text in which interconnected systems of signs construct ideological meaning, demonstrating the relevance of Saussure's semiotic framework for literary and film studies.*

KEYWORDS: *semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure, BlackKkKlansman, racial identity, film analysis*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji konstruksi identitas rasial dalam film *BlackKkKlansman* (2018) karya Spike Lee melalui teori semiotika Ferdinand de Saussure. Sementara penelitian terdahulu umumnya berfokus pada wacana, bahasa, atau penggambaran tematik tentang rasisme, penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana tanda-tanda verbal dan visual bekerja secara terpadu dalam membangun makna supremasi kulit putih dan identitas kulit Hitam. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis 20 adegan yang dipilih berdasarkan kriteria penelitian yang terdiri atas representasi verbal dan visual berdasarkan konsep penanda (signifier) dan petanda (signified) dari Saussure. Data dikumpulkan melalui penayangan film secara berulang, segmentasi adegan, dokumentasi, dan pencatatan, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis data interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penanda verbal dan visual secara bersama-sama membangun identitas rasial melalui representasi supremasi kulit putih, rasisme institusional, identitas kulit Hitam, dan perlawanan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa *BlackKkKlansman* berfungsi sebagai teks budaya yang membangun makna ideologis melalui sistem tanda yang saling berkaitan, sehingga menunjukkan relevansi kerangka semiotika Saussure bagi kajian sastra dan film.

KATA KUNCI: *semiotika, Ferdinand de Saussure, BlackKkKlansman, identitas rasial, analisis film.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature exists in various forms, including poetry, drama, prose, novels, and film¹. Although these genres differ in their modes of expression, they all communicate meaning through language, symbols, and narrative structures. As literature has evolved alongside technological and cultural changes, film has become one of the most influential literary forms by combining storytelling with visual and auditory elements. Unlike written literary works, films communicate meaning not only through language but also through images, sound, color, gestures, and cinematic techniques².

Within literary studies, film is regarded as a cultural text because it represents social realities, cultural values, and human experiences through visual, verbal, and narrative sign³. Rather than functioning solely as entertainment, films shape audience understanding of identity, ideology, and power by constructing meaning through interconnected visual and verbal elements, making them a valuable object of literary analysis⁴. Every dialogue, image, symbol, and cinematic technique contributes to the production of meaning, enabling films to communicate ideas that extend beyond the narrative itself. These characteristics make film particularly suitable for semiotic analysis because they allow researchers to examine how verbal and visual signs work together to communicate broader ideological messages⁵.

Semiotics provides a theoretical framework for explaining how such meanings are produced through signs. In semiotic studies, films are understood as structured systems of signs in which every cinematic element contributes to the communication of meaning. As Sya'dian (2015)⁶ explains, semiotics is the study of signs that enables people to understand and interpret the world around them. Similarly, Rose (2016)⁷ argues that visual analysis reveals how images communicate social and cultural meanings beyond spoken or written language. These perspectives demonstrate that semiotics provides an appropriate framework for examining how films construct ideological messages through visual and verbal representation. However, semiotics encompasses several theoretical models, each offering a

¹ Lewis Turco, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship, Second Edition* (University of New Mexico Press, 2020).

² Dr Totawad Nagnath Ramrao, *Film and Literature: An Overview*, 2016.

³ Robert P. Kolker and Marsha Gordon, *Film, Form, and Culture*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003398875>.

⁴ İrem Atasoy, "Literature and Film. Introduction to Literary Film Analysis," *Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 1, no. 37 (June 2017): 59-62.

⁵ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

⁶ Triadi Sya'dian, "ANALISIS SEMIOTIKA PADA FILM LASKAR PELANGI," *PROPORSI: Jurnal Desain, Multimedia Dan Industri Kreatif* 1, no. 1 (November 2015): 51, <https://doi.org/10.22303/proporsi.1.1.2015.51-63>.

⁷ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 4th edition (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2016).

different perspective on how signs produce meaning. Among these approaches, Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a clear and systematic explanation of the relationship between the observable form of a sign and the meaning it conveys.

According to Saussure, every sign consists of two inseparable components: the signifier, the observable form of the sign, and the signified, the concept or meaning associated with that form. In film, signifiers appear as dialogue, costumes, gestures, settings, symbols, and other cinematic elements, while the signified refers to the ideas or concepts communicated through these forms. By examining the relationship between signifier and signified, semiotic analysis explains how films transform visual and verbal elements into ideological meanings rather than presenting them merely as aesthetic or narrative devices. Recent research by Hafitri and Rahmawati (2025)⁸ further demonstrates that semiotic analysis effectively explains how films communicate cultural identity and ideological resistance through visual and verbal signs.

Building upon this theoretical perspective, the present study applies Saussure's semiotic framework to *BlackKkKlansman* (2018), a film that offers rich verbal and visual representations of racial issues. Directed by Spike Lee and based on the true story of Ron Stallworth, the first African American detective in the Colorado Springs Police Department who infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan during the 1970s. The film portrays racism through explicit visual and verbal signs, including Ku Klux Klan robes, Confederate flags, racist slogans, hate speeches, police authority, and racial slurs. These elements function as signifiers that communicate meanings related to white supremacy, institutional power, racial discrimination, and Black resistance. Because the film relies heavily on direct visual and verbal representation, Saussure's concept of signifier and signified provides an appropriate framework for explaining how these meanings are constructed.

Several previous studies have examined *BlackKkKlansman* from different perspectives. Alviniyanti (2019)⁹ in "Racism on Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman* Movie: A Critical Discourse Analysis," analyzed racist discourse using Critical Discourse Analysis and found that the film portrays racism through discriminatory language, unequal power relations, and dominant ideologies reflected in the characters' interactions. Pradyana (2023)¹⁰ in "The

⁸ Erlania Hafitri and Laili Etika Rahmawati, "Semiotic Analysis of Cultural Identity and Colonial Resistance in 'Black Panther: Wakanda Forever,'" *Jurnal Spektrum Komunikasi* 13, no. 2 (June 2025): 255-69, <https://doi.org/10.37826/spektrum.v13i2.973>.

⁹ Alviniyanti, "Racism on Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman* Movie: A Critical Discourse Analysis" (2019), <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/19240/1/15320132.pdf>.

¹⁰ Komang Geni Pradnyana, "The Analysis of Taboo Language as a Form of Racial

Analysis of Taboo Language as a Form of Racial Discrimination on BlackKkKlansman Film by Spike Lee," examined the use of taboo language and concluded that racial slurs and offensive expressions function as linguistic tools to reinforce racial discrimination and social inequality. Meanwhile, Hasanah & Novitasari (2021)¹¹ in "A Study of Racism and Hatred by Ku Klux Klan in Movie BlackKkKlansman," focused on the representation of racism and hatred embodied by the Ku Klux Klan, revealing how the organization promotes white supremacist ideology and racial intolerance throughout the film. Although, this previous studies have significantly contributed to understanding racism in *BlackKkKlansman* by examining discourse, taboo language, and thematic representations of racial discrimination. However, these studies primarily focus on individual aspects of the film, such as dialogue or broader social themes, without explaining how verbal and visual signs operate together to construct racial ideology. As a result, the semiotic relationship between signifier and signified across interconnected systems of signs remains insufficiently explored. Moreover, previous research has not provided an integrated analytical framework that explains how language, visual symbolism, cinematic composition, and institutional imagery collectively produce meanings of white supremacy, Black identity, and power relations.

Based on this research gap, this study examines how *BlackKkKlansman* constructs racial ideology through the interaction of verbal and visual signifiers using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. Specifically, this study identifies the verbal and visual signifiers representing white supremacy, Black identity, and institutional power, and analyzes how their relationship with the signified produces ideological meanings throughout the film. By integrating verbal and visual semiotic analysis within a single analytical framework, this research contributes to literary and film studies by demonstrating how cinematic meaning emerges through interconnected systems of signs rather than isolated verbal or visual representations.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using visual semiotic analysis based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signifier and signified. The qualitative approach was selected because the research aims to interpret meanings constructed through visual and verbal signs rather than measure numerical data¹². Visual analysis was used as the operational method to

Discrimination on Blackkkklansman Film by Spike Lee," *International Journal of Language and Literature* 6, no. 3 (July 2023): 107-18, <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijll.v6i3.29254>.

¹¹ Lailatul Hasanah and Nine Febrie Novitasari, *A Study of Racism and Hatred by Ku Klux Klan in Movie BlackKkKlansman* (2021).

¹² John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and*

examine how cinematic elements communicate racial ideology, while Saussure's semiotic theory served as the primary analytical framework for interpreting the relationship between signifiers and their signified meanings.

This study adopts visual semiotic analysis based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signifier and signified. According to Saussure, every sign consists of two inseparable components: the signifier, which refers to the observable form of a sign, and the signified, which refers to the concept or meaning represented by that form. In this study, visual and verbal elements such as dialogue, racial slurs, costumes, gestures, symbols, camera composition, and settings were analyzed as signifiers to identify the meanings they produce within the context of racial ideology. In addition, the principles of visual analysis proposed by Rose (2016)¹³ were applied to examine how cinematic images contribute to the construction of meaning.

The analysis followed the Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis developed by Miles et al. (2013)¹⁴, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

During the data reduction stage, the researcher repeatedly watched *BlackKkKlansman* (2018) to become familiar with the narrative and identify scenes relevant to the research objectives. The data were selected using purposive sampling, in which scenes were chosen based on predetermined analytical criteria rather than randomly. A total of 20 scenes were selected for analysis, consisting of 10 verbal signifiers and 10 visual signifiers. The selected scenes met one or more of the following criteria: (1) they contained explicit verbal or visual signs related to white supremacy, Black identity, institutional racism, or Black resistance; (2) they presented significant dialogues, symbols, gestures, costumes, settings, camera compositions, or other cinematic elements that functioned as signifiers within Saussure's semiotic framework; and (3) they played a significant role in constructing racial ideology throughout the narrative. Each selected scene was documented by recording its time stamp, dialogue, screenshots, and descriptions of relevant cinematic elements. The collected data were then classified into categories of verbal and visual signifiers to facilitate systematic analysis.

During the data display stage, the categorized data were systematically organized into analytical tables to facilitate interpretation. Each table contained the scene number, time stamp, visual or verbal signifier, the corresponding signified, and an explanation of how each sign contributes to the portrayal of white supremacy, Black identity, institutional

Mixed Methods Approaches (SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹³ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*.

¹⁴ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (SAGE Publications, 2013).

racism, or Black resistance. Presenting the data in this structured format enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns and relationships across the selected scenes while providing a clear basis for interpreting how verbal and visual signs interact to construct racial ideology throughout the film.

During the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the relationship between each signifier and its corresponding signified was interpreted using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. The interpretation considered the narrative context of each scene as well as the interaction between verbal and visual signs to explain how racial ideology is constructed in *BlackKkKlansman* (2018). The findings were continuously reviewed and compared across all categories to identify consistent patterns and ensure analytical coherence. To enhance the credibility of the study, the interpretations were supported by relevant theories and previous studies on semiotics, film, racism, and visual culture, ensuring that the conclusions remained grounded in both the empirical data and the theoretical framework.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings reveal that *BlackKkKlansman* (2018) presents a wide range of visual and verbal signs that communicate issues of race, identity, and power throughout the narrative. These signs appear repeatedly through dialogue, costumes, symbols, gestures, and institutional settings, demonstrating that the film constructs meaning through the interaction of multiple cinematic elements rather than through isolated scenes or individual characters¹⁵. The recurring use of these signs creates a consistent pattern that enables audiences to recognize how racial ideology is embedded throughout the narrative. Both verbal and visual representations contribute to this construction, with each reinforcing and complementing the meanings produced by the other¹⁶. Examining these representations through the relationship between signifier and signified reveals how the film communicates broader concepts of white supremacy, Black identity, institutional racism, and resistance¹⁷. These findings also demonstrate that meaning in the film is produced through the interaction between language and visual representation, allowing ideological messages to be communicated across different scenes and contexts¹⁸. To

¹⁵ Kolker and Gordon, *Film, Form, and Culture*.

¹⁶ Mutia R. Adam, "RACISM IN 'THE HELP' MOVIE BY TATE TAYLOR (A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH)," *British (Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Inggris)* 7, no. 2 (November 2019): 120, <https://doi.org/10.31314/british.7.2.120-129.2018>.

¹⁷ Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (John Wiley & Sons, 2021).

¹⁸ Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (Manchester New York: Manchester University Press, 2024),

provide a clear and systematic discussion of these findings, the analysis is divided into four categories: verbal representations of white supremacy, verbal representations of Black identity, visual representations of white supremacy, and visual representations of Black identity.

One of the most dominant verbal signifiers in *BlackKkKlansman* is the repeated use of the racial slur “N**ger” Throughout the film, the term is used numerous times, primarily by members of the Ku Klux Klan and other white characters to refer to African Americans. Historically, the N-word emerged during the transatlantic slave trade and became one of the most offensive racial slurs in the United States. It was widely used by slave owners and later during the eras of segregation and Jim Crow to dehumanize African Americans, reinforce racial hierarchy, and justify discrimination and violence¹⁹. Within Saussure's semiotic framework, the word functions as the signifier, while its signified extends beyond a simple racial label to encompass meanings of inferiority, exclusion, dehumanization, and white supremacy. Its repeated use throughout the film demonstrates that racist language functions not merely as offensive speech but as a symbolic mechanism that constructs and reinforces racial ideology.

The film also employs animal metaphors as verbal signifiers to intensify racist representation. Expressions such as “dirty monkeys,” “chimpanzees,” “baboon,” and “jungle bunny” remove the humanity of Black characters by comparing them to animals. The corresponding signified meanings include primitiveness, savagery, and biological inferiority. These metaphors reinforce racist ideology by portraying Black people as fundamentally different from and inferior to white Americans²⁰. The repetition of these expressions throughout the narrative demonstrates how language functions as a tool for maintaining racial hierarchy.

Besides verbal language, visual signifiers play an equally significant role. The white robes and pointed hoods worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan appear repeatedly throughout the film. As signifiers, these costumes immediately identify membership within the white supremacist organization. Their signified meanings extend beyond clothing to represent racial dominance, organized hatred, and ideological unity. Similarly, the recurring appearance of Confederate flags, cross-burning ceremonies, and Klan rituals visually communicates the historical continuity of white supremacy in

<https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526185853>.

¹⁹ Jacquelyn Rahman, “The N Word: Its History and Use in the African American Community,” *Journal of English Linguistics* 40, no. 2 (June 2012): 137-71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0075424211414807>.

²⁰ Krystal A. Smalls, Arthur K. Spears, and Jonathan Rosa, “Introduction: Language and White Supremacy,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (August 2021): 152-56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12329>.

American society²¹.

The portrayal of institutional power is also constructed through visual signs associated with law enforcement. Police uniforms, badges, interrogation rooms, official offices, and surveillance practices function as signifiers of legal authority. However, throughout the film these signifiers acquire different signified meanings as they are repeatedly associated with racial profiling, selective law enforcement, and institutional bias rather than justice and equality. The contrast between the overt racism of Patrolman Landers and the bureaucratic neutrality of Chief Bridges illustrates that racism within the police department extends beyond individual prejudice and is embedded in institutional practices²². This representation is further reinforced through the unequal treatment of different groups, where Black activists are subjected to close surveillance while the Ku Klux Klan is allowed to organize with relatively little intervention. Ultimately, the department's decision to destroy the investigation records after successfully exposing the Klan signifies institutional self-preservation over accountability, suggesting that the legal system prioritizes protecting its own reputation rather than confronting white supremacist ideology within its ranks.

In contrast, Black identity and resistance are represented through different systems of signs. Black Student Union meetings, Afro hairstyles, political speeches, and Ron Stallworth's undercover investigation function as signifiers of solidarity, resilience, and collective resistance. Rather than portraying Black identity solely as a victim of racism, the film represents resistance as an active response to racial oppression. These contrasting sign systems establish the central ideological conflict between white supremacy and Black resistance that drives the narrative.

Verbal Portrayal in *BlackKkKlansman* (2018)

Verbal signs constitute one of the primary semiotic resources through which *BlackKkKlansman* (2018) constructs and communicates racial ideology. Throughout the film, dialogues, political slogans, racial slurs, persuasive speeches, and everyday conversations function as signifiers that convey meanings extending beyond their literal expressions. Rather than serving merely as a means of communication between characters, these verbal elements reveal ideological positions, shape social relationships, and reinforce particular understandings of race and power within the narrative.

²¹ Moon-Kie Jung, João H. Costa Vargas, and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds., *State of White Supremacy: Racism, Governance, and the United States* (Stanford University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804777445>.

²² Joanelle A. Bailey et al., "Compounding Trauma: The Intersections of Racism, Law Enforcement, and Injury," *Current Trauma Reports* 8, no. 3 (May 2022): 105-12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40719-022-00231-7>.

Through the relationship between the signifier and the signified, language becomes a system of signs that produces meanings associated with racial hierarchy, identity, institutional authority, and political resistance. The recurring use of contrasting verbal expressions demonstrates that language is employed not only to reflect existing social realities but also to construct competing ideological perspectives. The analysis reveals that Spike Lee deliberately employs opposing forms of language to present two contrasting systems of meaning: white supremacy and Black identity. While racist language reinforces meanings of racial hierarchy, exclusion, and domination, expressions associated with Black identity promote self-acceptance, cultural pride, solidarity, and resistance. To present these findings systematically, the verbal analysis is divided into two categories: Verbal Portrayal of White Supremacy and Verbal Portrayal of Black Identity.

Verbal Portrayal of White Supremacy

Table 1. Verbal Portrayal of White Supremacy

No	Verbal White Supremacy Quotes & Time Stamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
1	"They're relying dirty monkeys" (00:03:08)	Animal metaphor used to describe Black people	Dehumanization	Comparing Black people to animals strips them of their humanity and portrays them as uncivilized. The metaphor legitimizes discrimination by presenting them as less than fully human.
2	"Do you really want your white child going to school with negroes?" (00:03:05)	Rhetorical question about racial integration	Fear of racial mixing and segregation	The dialogue frames racial integration as a threat to white society, reinforcing the ideology that racial separation is necessary to preserve white identity and privilege.
3	"N**gers selling soap, n**gers selling toothpaste, n**gers selling automobiles... everywhere you look there's always	associated with everyday occupations	Anxiety over Black social and economic advancement	The repetition expresses discomfort with visibility and advancement of African Americans.

No	Verbal White Supremacy Quotes & Time Stamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
	n**gers." (00:40:06-00:40:11)			
4	"We're cleansing this country from poor r*tar*ed chimpanzees." (01:21:27)	Dehumanizing metaphor combined with the language of purification	White supremacist ideology and ethnic cleansing	The dialogue portrays Black people as impure beings whose removal is necessary, echoing historical rhetoric used to legitimize racial persecution and genocide.
5	"WHITE POWER!" (KKK chant) (01:42:07)	Collective ideological slogan	White solidarity and racial superiority	The repeated chant functions as a symbol of collective identity, reinforcing the shared belief that white people possess natural political and social dominance.

Table 1 presents selected verbal expressions that portray white supremacy in *BlackKlansman* (2018). The data are arranged chronologically according to their appearance in the film to illustrate how racist ideology develops throughout the narrative. Using Saussure's semiotic framework, each dialogue is analyzed by identifying its signifier, the observable linguistic expression, and its signified, the ideological concept or meaning associated with that expression. The findings reveal that racist language functions not merely as offensive speech but as a system of signs that communicates racial hierarchy, dehumanization, institutional domination, and the normalization of violence against African Americans.

The earliest verbal signifier, "They're lying dirty monkeys" (00:03:08), establishes the dehumanization of African Americans through an animal metaphor. By equating Black people with animals, the dialogue signifies racial inferiority and denies their humanity, reflecting one of the fundamental mechanisms of white supremacist ideology. This pattern intensifies in the statement "Never think twice about killing n**gers" (01:21:12), where the historically loaded racial slur is combined with an explicit endorsement of violence. Historically, the term n**ger evolved from the Latin and Spanish word *niger*, meaning "black," but during the transatlantic slave trade and the era of slavery in the United States it became a derogatory label used to dehumanize African Americans and justify racial oppression²³. Rather than expressing personal hatred alone, the dialogue signifies the normalization of violence against those constructed as racially inferior, illustrating how language functions as a mechanism for legitimizing oppression.

The ideological construction of white supremacy becomes more explicit in the statement "We're cleansing this country from poor r*tarded chimpanzees" (01:21:27). Here, the combination of the verb *cleansing* and the animal metaphor *chimpanzees* signifies racial purification by portraying African Americans as a threat to society. This discourse extends beyond individual prejudice by framing racial violence as a necessary means of protecting the nation, thereby reinforcing the ideological logic of exclusion and domination.

The final two dialogues demonstrate that white supremacy in the film operates not only through discriminatory language but also through political ideology and collective identity. The question "Are you in favor of a white man's government in this country?" (01:37:36) signifies the institutionalization of white political authority by presenting racial

²³ Rahman, "The N Word."

privilege as a legitimate basis for governance. This ideological commitment reaches its strongest expression in the repeated chant "White Power!" (01:42:07), which transforms individual prejudice into collective solidarity among members of the Ku Klux Klan. Such slogans function as symbolic expressions that reinforce shared identity and sustain extremist ideology²⁴. Together, these recurring verbal signifiers illustrate Saussure's proposition that meaning is produced through relationships within a system of signs. Rather than functioning as isolated expressions, the selected dialogues collectively construct white supremacy as an interconnected ideological system founded on dehumanization, exclusion, institutional power, and organized racial domination

Verbal Portrayal of Black Identity

Table 2. Verbal Portrayal of Black Identity

No	Black Identity Quotes & Timestamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
1	<i>"It is time for you to stop running away from being Black."</i> (00:16:37)	A statement urging African Americans to embrace their racial identity.	Acceptance of Black identity and rejection of internalized racism	The dialogue encourages Black individuals to acknowledge and take pride in their racial identity instead of conforming to white cultural expectations. It signifies that empowerment begins with self-acceptance.

²⁴ Steven O. Roberts and Michael T. Rizzo, "The Psychology of American Racism.," *American Psychologist* 76, no. 3 (April 2021): 475-87, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000642>.

No	Black Identity Quotes & Timestamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
2	<i>"You must redefine beauty for Black people. Now that's Black Power."</i> (00:16:53)	A declaration challenging dominant beauty standards while linking them to the concept of Black Power.	Cultural pride, self-definition, and empowerment.	The statement rejects Eurocentric standards of beauty and promotes the idea that Black people should define beauty according to their own identity and culture. "Black Power" signifies dignity and self-determination rather than racial superiority.
3	<i>"Our lips are thick, our noses are broad, our hair is nappy, we are Black and we are beautiful."</i> (00:17:23)	Positive affirmation of physical characteristics traditionally targeted by racist stereotypes.	Black pride, self-acceptance, and resistance to racist beauty ideals.	The dialogue reclaims physical traits that have historically been used to discriminate against Black people, transforming them into symbols of beauty and cultural identity. It challenges racist narratives by affirming that Black identity is valuable and beautiful.

No	Black Identity Quotes & Timestamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
4	"All Power to All the People!" (00:21:58)	A political chant promoting collective empowerment and solidarity.	Equality, unity, and collective liberation.	Unlike exclusionary slogans based on racial superiority, this chant emphasizes shared power and justice for all oppressed communities. It represents resistance against systemic discrimination through solidarity and social equality.
5	"Black Power!" (01:42:26)	A political slogan repeatedly chanted by African American activists.	Black empowerment, racial pride, and collective resistance.	The slogan symbolizes self-determination and unity within the Black community. In the film, it functions as a direct ideological counterpoint to the Ku Klux Klan's chant of "White Power," highlighting the conflict between liberation and white supremacist domination.

Table 2 presents selected verbal expressions that portray Black identity in *BlackKkKlansman* (2018). Unlike the racist discourse discussed in Table 1, these dialogues construct positive meanings associated with Black identity through messages of self-acceptance, cultural pride, solidarity, and resistance. The data are arranged chronologically according to their appearance in the film to demonstrate how Black identity is gradually developed throughout the narrative. Using Saussure's semiotic framework, each dialogue is analyzed by identifying its signifier, the verbal expression presented in the film, and its signified, the concept or ideological meaning communicated through that expression. The findings show that language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a powerful means of affirming identity and resisting white supremacist ideology.

The earliest verbal signifier appears in the statement "It is time for you to stop running away from being Black" (00:16:37), which encourages

African Americans to embrace their racial identity rather than internalize the prejudice imposed by dominant society. This process of self-acceptance is further strengthened in the statement “You must define beauty for Black people. Now that’s Black Power.” (00:16:53), where the authority to define beauty is reclaimed from Eurocentric standards and relocated within the Black community. Together, these dialogues construct Black identity as a conscious rejection of internalized racism and an affirmation of cultural dignity²⁵. This message reflects the principles of the *Black is beautiful* movement, which encouraged African Americans to reject white standards of beauty and embrace Black physical features and cultural identity as sources of pride.

The ideological affirmation of Black identity becomes more explicit in Kwame Ture’s speech, “Our lips are thick, our noses are broad, our hair is nappy, we are Black and we are beautiful.” (00:17:23). Rather than reproducing stereotypes historically used to marginalize African Americans, the speech redefines these physical characteristics as symbols of beauty, dignity, and cultural pride. Through this reversal of meaning, the film demonstrates that the relationship between signifier and signified is ideologically constructed, allowing previously stigmatized attributes to become expressions of empowerment and self-worth.

The final two verbal signifiers extend this affirmation from individual identity to collective political action. The chant “All Power to All the People!” (00:21:58) signifies solidarity, equality, and collective empowerment by emphasizing unity among oppressed communities rather than racial exclusion²⁶. This message reaches its culmination in the repeated slogan “Black Power!” (01:42:26), which represents Black pride, political consciousness, and resistance to racial oppression²⁷. In contrast to the Ku Klux Klan’s slogan “White Power!”, the chant functions as a demand for equality and self-determination rather than racial domination. Together, these recurring verbal signifiers demonstrate that Black identity in *BlackKlansman* is constructed through an interconnected system of signs that promotes self-acceptance, cultural affirmation, collective solidarity, and resistance against white supremacist ideology.

²⁵ Robbie McVeigh, “Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton’s Black Power: The Politics of Liberation,” in *Mobilising Classics*, ed. Fiona Dukelow and Orla O’Donovan (Manchester University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7765/9780719095016.00012>.

²⁶ Stephen Shames and Seale Bobby, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (Abrams, 2016).

²⁷ Cone H James, *Black Theology and Black Power: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Orbis Books, 2018).

Visual Portrayal In BlackKlansman (2018)

Visual signs constitute another essential semiotic resource through which *BlackKlansman* (2018) communicates racial ideology. Throughout the film, costumes, gestures, facial expressions, settings, symbols, camera composition, and historical imagery function as signifiers that convey meanings beyond their literal appearance. Through the relationship between the signifier and the signified, these visual elements construct broader ideas related to race, identity, power, and resistance. The analysis demonstrates that Spike Lee deliberately employs visual symbolism to portray two contrasting ideological perspectives: white supremacy and Black identity. While visual signs associated with white supremacy portray racial domination, institutional power, and exclusion, visual signs associated with Black identity portray cultural pride, historical consciousness, solidarity, and resilience. To present the findings systematically, the visual analysis is divided into two categories: Visual Portrayal of White Supremacy and Visual Portrayal of Black Identity.

Visual Portrayal of White Supremacy

Table 3. Visual Portrayal of White Supremacy

No	Visual White Supremacy & Time Stamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
1	Black activist pulled over by racist police officers (00:23:37)	Police uniforms, patrol car, official badges, and the roadside stop of Black activists.	Institutional racism, racial profiling, and abuse of state authority.	The police uniforms and badges signify legal authority and public protection. However, within this scene, these symbols are used to intimidate and discriminate against Black citizens, illustrating how institutional power can reinforce racial inequality instead of ensuring justice.
2	Flip Zimmerman (posing as Ron Stallworth) meets the Ku Klux Klan members at a bar (00:39:53)	A man wearing a "White Pride" T-shirt, a Confederate flag displayed on the wall, KKK members casually socializing	The normalization of white supremacist ideology, racial solidarity, and collective identity.	Unlike the later ceremonial scenes, this sequence presents white supremacy as an ordinary part of everyday life. The "White Pride" T-shirt and Confederate flag function as visual signifiers that

No	Visual White Supremacy & Time Stamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
		while playing pool and drinking.		communicate shared racial ideology without the need for explicit verbal expression. Their casual display in a public social setting suggests that white supremacist beliefs are embedded within everyday culture rather than confined to formal KKK rituals.
3	KKK initiation ceremony (01:36:00)	Ceremonial oath-taking, white robes, burning cross, and initiation rituals.	Institutionalization of racist ideology, loyalty, and collective identity.	The initiation ceremony visually symbolizes the formal transmission of white supremacist beliefs from one generation to another. The ritual emphasizes commitment, obedience, and solidarity, portraying racism as an organized ideological institution sustained through symbolic practices and tradition.
4	KKK members watching <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> (1915) (01:40:56)	KKK members collectively watching the film and celebrating its racist imagery.	Cultural reinforcement of white supremacy through media representation.	By depicting the KKK celebrating <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> , Spike Lee demonstrates how cinema can function as a cultural sign that legitimizes racist ideology. The scene illustrates that visual media can shape collective beliefs and preserve racial prejudice across generations.

No	Visual White Supremacy & Time Stamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
5	Real-life White Lives Matter protest (02:06:20)	Protesters carrying signs, chanting slogans, and participating in a public demonstration.	Continuity of white supremacist ideology in contemporary society.	The documentary footage connects the historical narrative to present-day events, emphasizing that white supremacist ideology persists beyond the film's setting. It reinforces the idea that the signs of racism continue to circulate within modern political and social discourse.

Table 3 presents selected visual signifiers that portray white supremacy in *BlackKkKlansman* (2018). Unlike the verbal expressions analyzed in the previous tables, these data demonstrate how visual elements communicate racial ideology through symbols, institutional settings, costumes, rituals, and documentary footage. The scenes are arranged chronologically according to their appearance in the film to illustrate how visual signs progressively construct white supremacy throughout the narrative. Using Saussure's semiotic framework, each scene is examined by identifying its signifier, the observable visual element, and its signified, the ideological meaning associated with that element. The findings indicate that white supremacy is represented not only through explicit racist symbols but also through institutional practices and historical imagery that reinforce racial domination.

The earliest visual signifier appears when Black activists are stopped by racist police officers (00:23:37). The police uniforms, badges, patrol car, and unequal treatment of the activists signify institutional racism and racial profiling. Although these visual elements conventionally represent justice and legal authority, within the context of the film they communicate discriminatory law enforcement and unequal treatment of African Americans. This scene demonstrates that racism extends beyond individual prejudice and becomes embedded within state institutions, where legal authority is used to intimidate and marginalize Black citizens²⁸. The ideological construction of white supremacy continues during the first Ku Klux Klan meeting (00:39:53), where the White Pride T-shirt, the Confederate flag displayed on the wall, and the ordinary social interaction among Klan members normalize extremist

²⁸ Bailey et al., "Compounding Trauma."

beliefs within everyday social spaces. Rather than portraying racism solely through violence, the scene illustrates how white supremacist ideology is sustained through routine social practices and collective acceptance.

The visual portrayal of organized white supremacy becomes more explicit during the Ku Klux Klan initiation ceremony (01:36:00). The white robes, ceremonial gathering, burning cross, and ritual practices function as signifiers of collective loyalty, ideological commitment, and racial solidarity. Their meanings are not derived from their physical appearance alone but from their long-standing cultural associations with intimidation, racial violence, and organized extremism²⁹. This ideological message is reinforced in the subsequent scene in which Klan members collectively watch *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) (01:40:56). The screening, the audience's enthusiastic reactions, and the shared viewing experience demonstrate how visual media can legitimize racist beliefs and preserve white supremacist ideology across generations. By incorporating this historical reference, Spike Lee emphasizes the influential role of cinema in shaping collective memory and reinforcing racial ideology³⁰.

The final visual signifier appears through the documentary footage of the White Lives Matter protest (02:06:20). Protest banners, white nationalist symbols, crowds of demonstrators, and the confrontation with counter-protesters signify the persistence of contemporary white supremacist ideology. By concluding the film with real historical footage rather than fictional scenes, Spike Lee connects the events of the 1970s to present-day America, demonstrating that the structures of racial domination continue beyond the film's narrative. Together, these recurring visual signifiers illustrate Saussure's proposition that meaning is produced through relationships within a system of signs. Rather than functioning as isolated images, the selected scenes collectively construct white supremacy as an enduring ideological system maintained through institutional authority, cultural symbols, historical memory, and contemporary social movements.

²⁹ Roberts and Rizzo, "The Psychology of American Racism."

³⁰ Desmond Ang, "*The Birth of a Nation*: Media and Racial Hate," *American Economic Review* 113, no. 6 (June 2023): 1424-60, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20201867>.

Visual Portrayal of Black Identity

Table 4. Visual Portrayal of Black Identity

No	Black Identity Visual & Timestamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
1	Kwame Ture delivering a speech (00:14:23)	Kwame Ture addressing a gathering of African American students with confidence and conviction.	Black consciousness, political awakening, and racial empowerment.	Kwame Ture's presence and public speech symbolize the emergence of Black political consciousness during the Civil Rights era. His confident posture and influential role encourage African Americans to embrace their identity and resist racial oppression through collective action.
2	African Americans dancing together in a nightclub (00:24:28)	Black men and women celebrating through music, dancing, and social interaction.	Celebration of Black culture, unity, and cultural pride.	The lively atmosphere emphasizes the richness of African American culture beyond the narrative of racial discrimination. The scene presents Black identity as joyful, vibrant, and resilient, highlighting culture as a form of resistance against oppression.
3	Ron Stallworth and Patrice discussing iconic African American figures in film (01:04:19)	Conversation about Black representation in cinema and the significance of Black historical figures.	Critical awareness of representation and cultural identity.	The discussion reflects an awareness that media representation shapes public perceptions of race. By questioning stereotypical portrayals, the scene emphasizes the importance of authentic representation and cultural identity within popular culture.

No	Black Identity Visual & Timestamp	Signifier	Signified	Explanation
4	An elderly African American survivor recounting his experience under the Jim Crow laws (01:33:20)	Close-up shots of the elderly storyteller recounting his personal experiences while surrounded by attentive listeners.	Collective memory, historical trauma, and intergenerational resilience.	The visual focus on the storyteller's facial expressions and the audience's emotional reactions preserves the lived experiences of racial oppression. The scene symbolizes the transmission of historical memory and reinforces the importance of remembering past injustices as part of Black identity.
5	Dolly shot scene	Ron and Patrice aiming guns through window; Klan cross burning outside	Ongoing fight for equality and resistance against oppression; tension between Black protagonists and white supremacists	Spike lee used his iconic dolly shot as a visual metaphor for confrontation and struggle juxtaposition of Black resistance against public racism.

Table 4 presents selected visual signifiers that portray Black identity in *BlackKkKlansman* (2018). Unlike the visual representations of white supremacy discussed in Table 3, these scenes construct Black identity through images of cultural pride, historical consciousness, solidarity, and resistance. The visual data are arranged chronologically according to their appearance in the film to illustrate how Black identity develops throughout the narrative. Using Saussure's semiotic framework, each scene is analyzed by identifying its signifier, the observable visual element, and its signified, the ideological meaning conveyed through that element. The findings demonstrate that Black identity is represented not merely as a racial identity but as a continuing expression of resilience, empowerment, and resistance against systemic oppression.

The earliest visual signifier appears during Kwame Ture's speech (00:14:23). Kwame Ture's black suit, confident posture, expressive gestures, direct eye contact, and the attentive audience signify Black political consciousness, cultural pride, and collective empowerment. Although he is formally dressed, his commanding presence and persuasive delivery establish him as a respected political leader whose message encourages African Americans to embrace their identity. This affirmation continues in the nightclub scene (00:24:28), where music, dancing, joyful facial expressions, and social interaction signify the richness of Black culture, communal solidarity, and cultural resilience. Rather than emphasizing racial suffering, these scenes collectively portray Black identity as confident, vibrant, and united, challenging stereotypical representations that have historically marginalized African Americans.

The ideological construction of Black identity is further strengthened through the emotional testimony of an elderly survivor of the Jim Crow era (01:33:20). The speaker's emotional expression, close-up shots, and the audience's silent attention signify historical memory, collective trauma, and intergenerational resilience. The Jim Crow laws institutionalized racial segregation and denied African Americans equal access to public facilities, education, voting rights, and other civil liberties, leaving a lasting legacy of systemic discrimination³¹. This historical perspective is complemented by the conversation between Ron Stallworth and Patrice about influential African American figures in cinema (01:04:19). The photographs, visual references to Black performers, and the intimate discussion emphasize the importance of positive representation in shaping cultural identity and challenging racial stereotypes. Together, these scenes demonstrate that Black identity is constructed through both the preservation of historical memory and the

³¹ Anthony Gregory, "Policing Jim Crow America: Enforcers' Agency and Structural Transformations," *Law and History Review* 40, no. 1 (February 2022): 91-122, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0738248021000456>.

affirmation of cultural visibility.

The final visual signifier appears in Spike Lee's iconic dolly shot of Ron Stallworth and Patrice aiming their guns through the apartment window while a Ku Klux Klan cross burns outside (02:05:15). The two protagonists standing together, their weapons directed toward the unseen threat, the burning cross outside the window, and the distinctive dolly shot signify the continuing struggle for equality, collective resistance, and the confrontation between Black resilience and white supremacist violence. The visual contrast between the protagonists and the burning cross symbolizes the persistent tension between oppression and resistance, while the dolly shot intensifies the psychological and emotional weight of this confrontation. Together, these recurring visual signifiers illustrate Saussure's proposition that meaning is produced through relationships within a system of signs. Rather than functioning as isolated cinematic images, the selected scenes collectively construct Black identity as an evolving system of cultural pride, historical consciousness, solidarity, and enduring resistance against systemic racism.

Discussions

The findings presented in the previous section reveal that *BlackKlansman* employs both verbal and visual signifiers to construct meanings related to white supremacy, Black identity, and racial ideology. While the findings identify and interpret these signs individually, the discussion section synthesizes them to explain how they collectively function within Saussure's semiotic framework. By examining the relationship between signifier and signified, this section explores how the film constructs racial ideology through the interaction of language, visual representation, and cultural symbolism.

The Construction of White Supremacy through Verbal and Visual Signifiers

The findings demonstrate that *BlackKlansman* constructs white supremacy through the interaction of verbal and visual signifiers that consistently reinforce the same ideological message. Verbal signifiers, including racial slurs, discriminatory expressions, and political slogans, communicate explicit meanings of racial superiority, exclusion, and domination. These meanings are strengthened by visual signifiers such as police authority, Confederate flags, Ku Klux Klan robes, initiation rituals, and documentary footage of contemporary white supremacist movements. Rather than functioning independently, verbal and visual signs operate as an interconnected semiotic system that portrays white supremacy as a persistent ideology embedded within everyday social life, political institutions, and historical memory³².

³² Lorraine T. Dean and Roland J. Thorpe, "What Structural Racism Is (or Is Not) and How to Measure It: Clarity for Public Health and Medical Researchers," *American Journal of*

These findings support previous studies that identify racism as a central issue in *BlackKlansman*. Alvinianti (2019) demonstrated that racial discrimination is communicated through discourse and character interaction, while Pradnyana (2023) emphasized the role of taboo language in expressing racial discrimination. Hasanah and Novitasari (2021) likewise showed that the Ku Klux Klan represents organized racism and hatred within the film. The present study supports these findings but extends them by demonstrating that racial ideology is constructed not only through discourse or thematic representation but also through the interaction of verbal and visual signifiers. By integrating dialogue with cinematic elements such as costumes, historical symbols, institutional settings, and documentary footage, this research shows that ideological meaning emerges from the relationship between multiple systems of signs rather than from language alone.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings demonstrate the continued relevance of Saussure's concept of the signifier and the signified for contemporary film analysis. The study shows that ideological meanings are not produced by isolated signs but by recurring relationships between different verbal and visual signifiers that consistently evoke concepts of racial hierarchy, institutional domination, and white supremacy. This indicates that Saussure's framework can effectively explain how cinematic meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources, extending its application beyond linguistic analysis to multimodal film texts.

The findings also contribute to contemporary film semiotics by highlighting the importance of analyzing verbal and visual signs within a single analytical framework. Previous studies have tended to emphasize dialogue, discourse, or thematic issues separately, whereas this study demonstrates that racial ideology is more comprehensively understood when these semiotic resources are examined together. Beyond its academic contribution, the analysis also carries broader social significance. By revealing how racism is communicated through everyday language, institutional authority, historical symbols, and visual media, *BlackKlansman* encourages audiences to recognize that white supremacy operates not only through overt acts of hatred but also through cultural practices and social institutions

The Construction of Black Identity through Verbal and Visual Signifiers

In contrast of white supremacy, the black identity findings demonstrate that *BlackKlansman* constructs black identity through the interaction of verbal and visual signifiers that consistently communicate meanings of self-acceptance, cultural pride, collective solidarity, and political resistance. Verbal signifiers, including empowering speeches, political slogans, and affirmations of Black identity, encourage African Americans to reject

internalized racism and embrace their cultural heritage. These meanings are reinforced by visual signifiers such as Kwame Ture's speech, scenes of cultural celebration, historical testimony, and the symbolic composition of Ron Stallworth and Patrice confronting the Ku Klux Klan. Rather than functioning separately, these verbal and visual signs operate together to portray Black identity as an active process of empowerment rooted in shared history, cultural consciousness, and collective resilience.

These findings complement previous studies that have examined racism and racial discrimination in *BlackKkKlansman*. Alviniyanti (2019), Pradnyana (2023), and Hasanah and Novitasari (2021) primarily focused on racist discourse, discriminatory language, and the portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan as manifestations of racial oppression. While these studies successfully explain how racism is represented within the film, they devote relatively little attention to how *BlackKkKlansman* simultaneously constructs a positive representation of Black identity. The present study extends this discussion by demonstrating that Spike Lee deliberately balances the portrayal of racial oppression with representations of cultural affirmation, historical consciousness, and collective resistance. This dual construction reveals that Black identity functions not merely as a response to racism but as an independent ideological framework grounded in dignity, solidarity, and empowerment.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings further demonstrate the applicability of Saussure's concept of the signifier and the signified to contemporary film analysis. The study shows that ideological meanings associated with Black identity emerge through recurring relationships between verbal and visual signifiers rather than through isolated cinematic elements. Political speeches, cultural celebrations, historical memory, and symbolic visual compositions repeatedly evoke concepts of resilience, equality, and self-determination, illustrating that meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple signs within an integrated semiotic system. This finding supports the view that Saussure's framework remains relevant for explaining how films construct ideological meanings through multimodal forms of representation.

The findings also contribute to contemporary film semiotics by demonstrating that Black identity is communicated through the integration of language, visual imagery, cultural symbols, and historical references rather than through dialogue alone. By examining these semiotic resources within a single analytical framework, this study provides a broader understanding of how cinema constructs positive racial identities alongside representations of oppression. Beyond its academic contribution, the findings also have broader social significance. By portraying Black identity through self-acceptance, cultural pride, historical awareness, and collective resistance,

BlackKkKlansman encourages audiences to recognize that racial identity is actively shaped through culture, memory, and community rather than by stereotypes imposed through discriminatory ideology.

The Relationship Between Signifier and Signified in Constructing Racial Ideology

The findings demonstrate that Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the relationship between the signifier and the signified provides a systematic framework for explaining how *BlackKkKlansman* constructs racial identity through interconnected verbal and visual signs. Throughout the film, dialogue, political slogans, costumes, historical symbols, institutional settings, camera composition, and documentary footage function as signifiers that repeatedly evoke concepts related to white supremacy, Black identity, institutional power, and resistance. Rather than operating as isolated cinematic elements, these signs interact to produce coherent ideological meanings, illustrating that racial identity is constructed through a structured semiotic system rather than presented as an objective social reality.

This finding extends previous studies on *BlackKkKlansman*, which have primarily examined racism through discourse analysis, taboo language, or thematic representation. While these studies successfully explain how racism is portrayed in the film, they pay less attention to how verbal and visual signs operate together as an integrated system of meaning. By applying Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified to both linguistic and visual elements, the present study demonstrates that cinematic meaning emerges through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources rather than through dialogue or imagery alone. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of how racial identity and ideological meanings are constructed throughout the narrative.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings demonstrate that Saussure's semiotic model remains highly relevant for contemporary film analysis. Although Saussure originally developed his theory to explain linguistic signs, this study shows that the relationship between signifier and signified can also explain how films communicate complex ideological meanings through multimodal forms of representation. Different signifiers, despite varying in form, consistently produce interconnected signified meanings when they operate within the same cultural and narrative context. This suggests that cinematic meaning is generated through relationships among multiple verbal and visual signs rather than through individual symbols considered in isolation.

The study also contributes to contemporary film semiotics by demonstrating the value of integrating verbal and visual analysis within a single analytical framework. Instead of treating dialogue and imagery as

separate sources of meaning, this research shows that they complement one another in constructing representations of racial identity, power, and resistance. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the findings also carry broader social implications. By illustrating how racial identity is socially constructed through language, visual symbols, historical memory, and institutional representation, *BlackKkKlansman* encourages audiences to critically examine how meanings about race are produced, reinforced, and challenged within society. Consequently, the film can be understood not only as a historical narrative but also as a cultural text that shapes public awareness of racism and the continuing struggle for equality.

Social Implications of *BlackKkKlansman* (2018)

Beyond its contribution to literary and film studies, the findings of this research demonstrate the broader social significance of *BlackKkKlansman* as a cultural text that encourages critical reflection on racism and racial identity. Through the systematic interaction of verbal and visual signifiers, the film reveals that racism is not limited to overt acts of hatred or individual prejudice but is also embedded within language, cultural symbols, historical narratives, and social institutions. By exposing these interconnected systems of signs, the film invites audiences to recognize that racial ideology is socially constructed and continually reproduced through everyday practices rather than existing as a natural or fixed reality.

The integration of historical events with contemporary documentary footage further strengthens this social message by connecting the experiences of the 1970s with present-day racial issues. Rather than portraying racism as a problem confined to the past, *BlackKkKlansman* illustrates the continuity of white supremacist ideology across different historical periods. This connection encourages viewers to examine how historical discrimination continues to influence contemporary social and political realities, promoting greater awareness of the persistence of racial inequality and institutional discrimination.

The film also highlights the importance of positive racial representation in challenging discriminatory narratives. Through visual and verbal portrayals of Black identity characterized by cultural pride, historical consciousness, solidarity, and resistance, *BlackKkKlansman* presents an alternative perspective that counters stereotypes and affirms the dignity of African Americans. These representations encourage audiences to understand racial identity as something actively constructed through culture, collective memory, and shared experience rather than through prejudiced assumptions or racial stereotypes. In doing so, the film demonstrates how cinema can contribute to broader discussions about equality, diversity, and social justice.

Overall, the findings suggest that films function not only as artistic or

entertainment media but also as influential cultural texts capable of shaping public understanding of social issues. By communicating ideological meanings through interconnected systems of verbal and visual signs, *BlackKkKlansman* encourages audiences to critically evaluate representations of race, identity, and power within society. Consequently, the film illustrates the potential of cinema to promote critical awareness of racism, stimulate public dialogue on racial justice, and encourage reflection on the continuing struggle for equality in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how racial identity is constructed in *BlackKkKlansman* (2018) through Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the signifier and the signified. By employing a qualitative semiotic approach, the study analyzed verbal and visual signifiers to explain how the film constructs representations of white supremacy and Black identity. Rather than treating the film solely as entertainment or a historical narrative, the study approached it as a cultural text in which ideological meanings are systematically produced through interconnected systems of signs.

The findings demonstrate that *BlackKkKlansman* constructs white supremacy through verbal signifiers such as racial slurs, discriminatory expressions, and political slogans, reinforced by visual signifiers including Ku Klux Klan symbols, institutional authority, historical imagery, and documentary footage. Conversely, Black identity is constructed through empowering speeches, political slogans, cultural practices, historical memory, and symbolic visual compositions that communicate dignity, solidarity, resilience, and resistance. Together, these verbal and visual signifiers create two opposing semiotic systems that shape the film's representation of racial identity and power relations.

The study further demonstrates that Saussure's theory provides an effective framework for explaining how ideological meanings emerge through the relationship between the signifier and the signified. By integrating verbal and visual analysis within a single analytical framework, this research extends previous studies that have primarily focused on discourse, language, or thematic issues. The findings contribute to contemporary film semiotics by showing that cinematic meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources rather than through isolated verbal or visual elements. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study also highlights the broader social significance of *BlackKkKlansman* as a cultural text that encourages audiences to critically reflect on racism, racial identity, and the continuing influence of white supremacy in contemporary society.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited to the analysis of a single film and the application of Saussure's semiotic framework. Future

research may examine other films addressing race, identity, or social inequality, compare films from different cultural contexts, or integrate Saussure's model with other semiotic approaches, such as those proposed by Barthes or Peirce, to provide broader perspectives on how cinematic signs construct ideological meaning.

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