



From Femininity to Resistance: Re-signifying Pink in the 17+8 People's Movement in Indonesia

Wahyu Mahesa Miarta¹, Muhammad Abduh², Raesita Rakhmawati Rosadi³, Jauhar Wahyuni⁴, Rizqi Mutqiyyah⁵, Muhammad Danu Winata⁶, Muhammad Zawil Kiram⁷
^{1,2,4,5,6}Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

³Department of Communication Science, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

⁷Department of Sociological Studies, The University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

Contributor email : wahyumiarta@unesa.ac.id

Abstract

This article examines how pink is re-signified from a gender-coded color associated with softness and femininity into a symbol of solidarity, civic courage, and nonviolent resistance within Indonesia's 17+8 People's Movement. It asks how street practices and digital circulation reshape the meaning of pink, support collective identity, and connect gendered symbolism to demands for economic justice and governmental accountability. The study combines semi-structured interviews with three participants—a field activist, a digital poster artist, and a homemaker—participant observation, and analysis of protest clothing, placards, profile frames, social media images, and movement narratives. Drawing on Barthesian semiotics, feminist visual analysis, and Southern sociology, the findings show that pink operates as a care-based counter-sign that converts associations of care, domesticity, and femininity into public courage. It also functions as a vernacular semiotic infrastructure linking embodied protest, household economic pressures, religious respectability, youth creativity, and networked media. Pink lowers the threshold of recognition and participation and translates concerns about prices, labor, inequality, and state legitimacy into a culturally legible form. Its rapid circulation, however, creates risks of aestheticization, decontextualization, and commercial co-optation, making continual anchorage to the 17+8 demands essential. By theorizing from the Indonesian case, the article treats Global South actors as producers of concepts and contributes to visual social movement studies, feminist sociology, digital activism, and Southern sociological perspectives.

Keywords: pink; re-signification; visual resistance; digital activism; care-based counter-sign; southern perspectives

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 2026-06-24
date

Revised: 2026-07-19
date

Accepted: 2026-07-19
date

Published: 2026-07-27
date

INTRODUCTION

Visual symbols are not secondary ornaments of collective action; they are central to how social movements communicate grievances, construct collective identities, and make political claims publicly recognizable. Colors, images, clothing, and other visual repertoires allow participants to condense complex demands into forms that can be rapidly interpreted and circulated. Research on the visual dimensions of protest shows that symbols can organize attention, produce emotional identification, and connect dispersed participants to a shared political project (Doerr 2014; Awad and Wagoner n.d.; Nyamari 2024). Color is therefore not politically neutral. Its meanings are produced through cultural convention, historical association, and strategic use within particular struggles.

Pink offers a particularly revealing case because its dominant cultural associations have long been gendered. In many contemporary settings, pink is linked to femininity, softness, care, vulnerability, and domesticity. These associations can reproduce restrictive gender expectations, but they also provide material for political reinterpretation. Feminist actors have increasingly treated pink not as a fixed expression of conventional femininity but as a contested cultural sign that can be reworked to communicate agency, solidarity, and resistance (Gupta 2024; Lu 2023). Comparable processes of chromatic re-signification can be seen when movements transform familiar colors into signs of academic freedom, political defiance, or collective belonging (Lipenga 2024). Such transformations demonstrate that the political force of a color does not reside in the color itself, but in the social practices through which actors attach new meanings to it.

Studies of protest symbolism further suggest that color can strengthen collective identity by making participation visible and recognizable. Shared visual cues help participants identify one another, coordinate action, and represent the movement to external audiences. Evidence from the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, for example, shows that collective identity is not simply an individual attitude but is produced through participation, shared narratives, and publicly recognizable repertoires (Kann, Steinert-Threlkeld, and Alvarez 2023). Research on electoral branding likewise demonstrates that colors can condense political positions and make them legible to broad publics (Alturas et al. 2024), while semiotic analyses of protest slogans show how verbal and nonverbal signs work together to communicate moral claims (Aliwy Mohammed et al. 2024). These studies establish the mobilizing potential of

color, but they also indicate that its meaning remains dependent on context, audience, and the narratives that accompany it.

A feminist interpretation of color symbolism requires attention to intersectionality. Pink does not communicate a single or universal form of womanhood; its meaning changes across differences of class, generation, religion, occupation, and political experience. The political significance of a pink hijab worn by a homemaker, for instance, cannot be understood solely as a reference to femininity. It may simultaneously invoke care work, religious respectability, economic insecurity, maternal responsibility, and civic courage. Indonesian gender-based movements have historically mobilized diverse social identities in struggles for equality and justice (Reftantia, Jendrius, and Maihasni 2022; Afifah et al. 2025). Similarly, women’s resistance to environmentally harmful development in Padarincang illustrates how gendered identities can intersect with ecological knowledge and community survival (Sulistiani and Indriyany 2024). These cases underline the importance of examining how a symbol creates coalition across distinct experiences rather than assuming that all participants interpret it identically.

The circulation of protest symbols has been transformed by digital media. Social media platforms enable images, hashtags, profile frames, short videos, and slogans to move rapidly between street demonstrations and networked publics. Digital connectivity can amplify marginalized voices, widen participation, and sustain activism beyond a single protest site (Laksana and Abduh 2023; Miarta 2024). Instagram and related platforms have also become important spaces for feminist communication, allowing activists to narrate gendered experiences through highly visual formats (Lu 2023; Rofi’ah and Luxy 2025). Yet the same conditions that accelerate circulation can simplify political messages, detach symbols from their historical context, and expose movements to misinformation or appropriation (Park 2024). Digital literacy, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community-based interpretation are therefore essential to maintaining the connection between a movement’s visual identity and its substantive demands.

Within this broader landscape, the 17+8 People’s Movement offers a significant Indonesian case of visual and political re-signification. The movement brings together actors with different social backgrounds and uses pink across street and digital practices, including clothing, headbands, flags, posters, profile photographs, and online narratives. In this context, pink is not merely decorative. It operates as a recognizable visual code through which

participants express solidarity, challenge political dismissiveness, and articulate demands for accountability, economic justice, and social equality. Its association with femininity and gentleness makes it immediately legible, while its placement within protest transforms that familiarity into a political resource. The movement thus demonstrates how grassroots actors can appropriate an apparently ordinary cultural sign and convert it into a counter-sign of collective courage.

This process can be understood as re-signification: the meaning of a sign is neither permanent nor inherent but can be reconstructed through repeated social use. Pink initially draws on established gendered connotations, but activists combine it with protest slogans, bodily presence, policy demands, and digital circulation. Through this combination, the color comes to signify peaceful defiance, collective care, and public courage rather than passivity. The symbol's effectiveness depends precisely on this tension between familiarity and reversal. Audiences recognize the existing cultural code, yet encounter it in a context that unsettles its conventional meaning. Pink becomes politically powerful because it both recalls and contests the stereotype attached to it.

At the same time, re-signification is neither automatic nor secure. Once a protest symbol becomes highly visible, it can be aestheticized, commercialized, or detached from the grievances that produced it. Media coverage may privilege striking images while marginalizing demands concerning labor, inequality, public accountability, or institutional reform. The same visual simplicity that facilitates rapid recognition can therefore reduce a movement to a marketable style. Community engagement provides an important safeguard against this dilution. When visual symbols remain connected to chants, captions, discussion circles, mutual aid, and locally grounded interpretations of the movement's demands, their meanings are continually renewed through collective practice. The durability of pink as a political sign consequently depends not only on media visibility but also on the organizational relations that sustain it.

Existing scholarship provides important insights into visual protest, feminist digital activism, campaign color, and grassroots mobilization. However, three limitations remain. First, studies often treat color as a stable identifier or branding device rather than examining how a gendered color is actively transformed into a counter-hegemonic sign. Second, research on digital activism frequently focuses on reach, connectivity, or platform use without tracing how meaning moves between embodied protest and online representation. Third, relatively

little attention has been paid to how a re-signified color can create an inclusive political register across gender, generation, religion, and social class in the Indonesian context. As a result, the relationship between semiotic transformation, collective identity, digital circulation, and grassroots participation remains insufficiently integrated.

This study addresses these limitations by examining how pink is produced, circulated, and interpreted within the 17+8 People’s Movement. It argues that pink functions as a counter-sign: a culturally familiar but politically reconstructed symbol that converts associations of softness and care into a language of solidarity, civic courage, and resistance. The study contributes to research on social movements by showing that visual symbols do more than represent a pre-existing collective identity; they participate in producing that identity. It contributes to feminist scholarship by demonstrating how a gender-coded sign can be reclaimed without simply rejecting femininity, instead redefining care and protection as political capacities. It also contributes to the study of digital activism by tracing how street-level practices and networked media jointly shape the public intelligibility of a protest symbol. These contributions speak to wider concerns embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals on Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, while keeping the analysis centered on the movement’s own practices and demands.

Accordingly, the study asks three questions: (1) How do street practices and social media platforms circulate and re-signify pink within the 17+8 People’s Movement, and how does this circulation shape public perception? (2) How do digital narratives, visual representations, hashtags, influencers, and online communities use pink to construct collective identity, participation, and mobilization? (3) How does the re-signification of pink connect gendered symbolism with broader claims for social justice, accountability, and political change?

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to examine how pink was produced, circulated, and interpreted within the 17+8 People’s Movement. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Three informants were selected because they represented distinct positions in the movement’s visual and communicative practices: a 27-year-old field activist, a 23-year-old digital poster designer, and

a 45-year-old homemaker who participated in the protest while wearing a pink hijab. Informants are identified by role and age to maintain consistency across the analysis.

Participant observation was conducted at a principal protest site near the House of Representatives in Jakarta. Field notes documented the use of pink shirts, headbands, small flags, hijabs, banners, chants, and interactions among participants. Particular attention was paid to the visual contrast between pink-clad protesters and dark-uniformed security personnel, as well as to the widely recorded moment in which the homemaker participant moved toward the police line carrying a protest message.

Digital observation focused on Twitter/X and Instagram materials associated with the movement, including the hashtags #BravePink and #178TuntutanRakyat. The corpus comprised observed profile frames, posters, memes, captions, short videos, and live-streaming practices that connected street protest to networked participation. These materials were used qualitatively to examine patterns of circulation and meaning-making; the study does not use the observed posts to estimate the total number of participating accounts or the movement's population-level reach.

The interviews, field notes, and visual-digital materials were analyzed iteratively. First, thematic analysis identified recurring meanings related to gender stereotypes, nonviolent resistance, collective identity, household economic pressure, religious respectability, youth creativity, and digital solidarity. Second, Barthes's semiotic framework was used to distinguish denotative forms, connotative meanings, and the mythic or ideological narrative of "Brave Pink" (Barthes 1972). Comparison across interview, offline observation, and digital observation enabled the analysis to trace how the same symbol moved between embodied and mediated settings.

The analysis treats participants' interpretations as substantive social knowledge rather than merely as illustrations of an externally imposed theory. At the same time, the limited number of interviews means that the findings identify mechanisms of re-signification and mobilization rather than claiming to represent every participant in the movement. This methodological boundary is especially important when interpreting differences of gender, class, generation, religion, and digital access within the broader coalition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that pink acquired political force in the 17+8 People’s Movement not because the color carried an inherently resistant meaning, but because participants repeatedly attached it to embodied protest, economic grievance, intergenerational participation, digital circulation, and demands for governmental accountability. Across the interviews, participant observation, and visual materials examined in this study, pink operated simultaneously as a recognizable sign, an affective language, and an organizing device. It helped participants identify one another, enabled protest images to travel rapidly across media platforms, and translated abstract political demands into culturally familiar forms. The analytical significance of the case therefore extends beyond the claim that color “represents” resistance. Pink participated in producing the movement’s collective identity, determining how resistance was seen, felt, narrated, and made accessible to people whose social positions did not necessarily conform to conventional images of the political activist.

The discussion develops this argument through several connected dimensions. First, it examines the semiotic reversal through which pink moved from a gendered sign of softness to a counter-sign of civic courage. Second, it analyzes how dismissive governmental performances generated an affective backlash and how younger participants expanded the movement’s visual and digital repertoires. Third, it considers pink as an infrastructure of collective identity rather than a merely decorative emblem. Fourth, it examines the media logics that accelerated the symbol’s circulation while simultaneously exposing it to aestheticization and co-optation. Fifth, it shows how the figure of the homemaker in a pink hijab connected gendered care, household hardship, religious respectability, and public dissent. Finally, it develops the case as a contribution to Global South and Southern sociological perspectives by treating Indonesian protest practices as a source of concepts rather than as local data to which metropolitan theory is simply applied.

Re-signifying Pink: From Denotation to a Counter-Hegemonic Myth

At the denotative level, the materials analyzed in this study display ordinary objects: pink shirts, headbands, small flags, hijabs, posters, and digital profile frames. These objects are visible and materially uncomplicated. Their political significance emerges at the connotative level, where participants connect them to unity, courage, nonviolence, and refusal. Barthes’s account of myth is useful here because it explains how an already meaningful sign can become the signifier of a second-order ideological system (Barthes 1972). Pink enters the movement

with sedimented associations of femininity, gentleness, intimacy, and care. The movement does not erase those associations. Instead, it reorganizes them. Softness is recoded as disciplined nonviolence; care becomes protection of the public; femininity becomes a source of moral and political authority; and visibility becomes a refusal to be silenced.

This process is better described as a mythic reversal than as a simple replacement of one meaning by another. Pink remains recognizable precisely because its prior gendered meaning is still present. The force of “Brave Pink” lies in the tension between the inherited code and the insurgent context in which it is used. A color associated with vulnerability appears in spaces of confrontation; an aesthetic linked to domestic femininity is worn in front of state institutions; and a register of care is attached to demands for structural accountability. The movement therefore turns the perceived weakness of the sign into its political advantage. Because audiences already know how to read pink, the reversal can be grasped rapidly. Yet what they encounter is no longer pink as passive femininity, but pink as collective care made confrontational.

The first informant’s account illustrates how this reversal was enacted through the combination of color, bodily presence, and language. Participants gathered at the house of representatives wearing pink shirts, head ribbons, and carrying small flags while shouting, “Berani! Pink berani! Rakyat takkan dibungkam lagi!” (“Be brave! Pink is brave! The people will not be silenced anymore!”). The chant does not merely accompany the color; it actively instructs participants and observers how the color should be interpreted. The verbal declaration anchors the visual sign to a political meaning. Pink becomes “brave” through repetition, collective performance, and its attachment to a claim about popular voice. This relation between image and language corresponds to research showing that protest communication gains force when verbal and nonverbal signs operate together rather than as isolated forms (Aliwy Mohammed et al. 2024).

“Why pink? Because we wanted to challenge the stereotype. Many people say pink is weak, a child’s color, or a woman’s color. That is precisely what we reversed. Pink became brave; pink became a symbol of nonviolent resistance. When people saw a pink crowd, they immediately understood that a new movement was emerging—one that differed from masculine politics” (Field activist, age 27).

The case also complicates the idea that political symbols must abandon femininity in order to communicate strength. A conventional empowerment narrative might suggest that pink

becomes resistant only after being stripped of its association with care and softness. The data indicate a different process. Participants did not construct courage as the opposite of care; they made care one of courage’s conditions. Pink expressed a refusal that was forceful without being masculinized and confrontational without relying on the visual grammar of aggression. This matters for feminist analysis because it avoids reproducing a hierarchy in which hardness, militancy, and masculine-coded behavior are treated as the most authentic forms of politics. The re-signification of pink instead expands the cultural vocabulary through which political courage can be recognized (Gupta 2024; Lu 2023).

The semiotic transformation is nonetheless unstable. Barthes emphasizes that myth can naturalize historically produced meanings and conceal the relations through which those meanings are made (Barthes 1972). Once “Brave Pink” becomes familiar, it may appear self-evident and lose its connection to the specific grievances that produced it. The symbol can become “form without substance” if media audiences remember the color but forget the demands. The movement’s chants, banners, captions, interview narratives, and explicit references to the 17+8 platform therefore function as forms of anchorage. They prevent pink from floating free as a fashionable image and repeatedly return it to questions of accountability, labor, household costs, and institutional justice. The political work of re-signification must consequently be understood as continuous rather than complete.

Table 1. Semiotic Re-signification of Pink in the 17+8 People’s Movement

Semiotic level	Empirical manifestation	Political meaning
Denotation	Pink shirts, headbands, flags, hijabs, posters, and profile frames.	A visible and recognizable marker of participation.
Connotation	Pink combined with chants, bodily presence, protest messages, and digital sharing.	Solidarity, civic courage, collective care, and nonviolent resistance.
Myth / ideology	The recurring public narrative of “Brave Pink.”	A counter-hegemonic claim that feminized softness and ordinary citizenship can become sources of political strength.

Note: The table synthesizes interview accounts, participant observation at the Jakarta protest site, and qualitative observation of Twitter/X and Instagram materials.

Governmental Dismissiveness, Affective Backfire, and Youth Counter-Conduct

Participants situated the growth of mobilization within a context of frustration toward official statements and conduct perceived as dismissive, insufficient, or unserious. Accounts of government officials dancing during formal proceedings were interpreted not simply as breaches of decorum but as evidence of distance between political elites and citizens’ everyday difficulties. The significance of these performances lies in their affective consequences. They

communicated, to participants, that grievances concerning economic pressure and public accountability were not being treated with the seriousness they deserved. Instead of calming dissatisfaction, the performances generated what may be called an affective backfire: displays intended or perceived as routine political performance intensified the public impression of an institutional legitimacy gap.

Pink emerged in this context as a form of counter-conduct. The movement answered dismissiveness not through visual chaos but through a disciplined and highly legible aesthetic. The contrast is important. Where official conduct was interpreted as trivializing citizens' concerns, protesters used an apparently "light" color to communicate seriousness. Pink denied the state a monopoly over the interpretation of political legitimacy. It transformed a color that could easily be dismissed as decorative into a public accusation: institutions had failed to listen, and those culturally coded as soft or ordinary were now appearing as political subjects. The counter-conduct was therefore semiotic as well as behavioral. Participants did not only oppose policy; they opposed the official framing of whose emotions, appearances, and grievances counted as politically consequential.

Participants also described youth involvement as a turning point: "Hadirnya peran generasi muda menjadi titik balik pergerakan dalam melawan tirani politik..." ("The emergence of youth leadership marked a turning point in resisting political tyranny..."). Youth participation increased numbers, but its deeper effect was to broaden the movement's repertoire. Younger participants combined street demonstration with style-conscious poster design, coordinated accessories, slogans, memes, profile frames, and platform-specific modes of circulation. This did not mean that youth replaced older or more conventional actors. Rather, they helped connect different political generations through a common visual language. Pink became a point of translation between people who entered the movement through physical protest, household grievances, artistic production, and social media.

The youth contribution also changed the affective atmosphere of protest. The use of visually playful or aesthetically appealing forms did not necessarily depoliticize the movement. It allowed participants to challenge the assumption that serious politics must appear solemn, masculine, or institutionally scripted. The combination of humor, fashion, creativity, and explicit policy demands enlarged the repertoire of legitimate political expression. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that visual creativity can support collective identity and broaden participation by making protest spaces more culturally accessible (Doerr 2014;

Nyamari 2024). Yet the case adds an important qualification: aesthetics become politically productive only when they remain attached to interpretive communities that explain what the images demand.

Pink as Collective Identity and Mobilizing Infrastructure

The data show that pink functioned as a unifier, amplifier, and subversive cue. It enabled participants who did not know one another personally to recognize a shared political affiliation. Shirts, flags, headbands, hijabs, and digital frames created what may be called a color script: a simple but socially learned instruction for identifying who belonged to the protest and how one might enter it. Such recognition reduced the uncertainty that often accompanies participation in fluid collective action. A person could locate allies, join chants, share materials, or reproduce an online image without first mastering the entire ideological language of the movement. Pink lowered the symbolic threshold of participation.

This does not mean that the movement’s collective identity was superficial. Visual accessibility made deeper forms of interaction possible. A shared color created initial recognition, but identity was sustained through chanting, discussion, exchange of information, mutual aid, and the translation of national demands into locally intelligible concerns. The movement’s identity was thus layered. At one level, pink provided a rapid and inclusive marker. At another, participants filled the marker with narratives about food prices, labor, education, gender equality, governmental accountability, and institutional integrity. Collective identity did not precede symbolic action; it was produced through the repeated connection between these layers.

This finding extends research that treats collective identity as an outcome of participation, public narrative, and relational interaction rather than as a fixed attitude held by isolated individuals (Kann, Steinert-Threlkeld, and Alvarez 2023). In the 17+8 People’s Movement, pink helped transform dispersed grievances into a shared field of visibility. People with different motivations could recognize themselves within the same symbol without becoming socially identical. The color therefore created unity without requiring complete sameness. Its broad cultural familiarity allowed it to host different experiences—youth creativity, maternal care, religious respectability, economic frustration, and digital activism—while still presenting a coherent public image.

The term “infrastructure” is useful because pink did more than communicate a message after organization had already occurred. It supported organization itself. It facilitated

recognition, coordinated visual presence, amplified media attention, and provided reusable material for digital participation. In this sense, the movement's visual identity was not a surface placed on top of political action. It was one of the mechanisms through which political action became possible. The symbol connected bodies in protest spaces, images on screens, and policy narratives in public debate. This relational function helps explain why a seemingly simple aesthetic choice could have effects on mobilization disproportionate to its material cost.

At the same time, the inclusiveness of a visual symbol should not be romanticized. A color can make participation visible while concealing unequal access to decision-making, technology, media visibility, or organizational authority. The interviews suggest that participants attached diverse meanings to pink, but the small qualitative sample cannot establish that every participant interpreted the symbol in the same way. The analytical value of the findings is therefore not that pink generated a universally shared consciousness. Rather, the case shows how a flexible symbol can coordinate action despite interpretive variation. Its strength lies in its capacity to sustain partial identification across social difference.

Media Logics and Digital Circulation: Visibility, Acceleration, and Co-optation

Participants observed that pink's established association with femininity made protest images easier and faster for broad audiences to recognize. This familiarity operated as a form of semiotic acceleration. Images required less explanatory context because viewers already possessed a cultural vocabulary for reading the color. When pink appeared against dark uniforms, institutional buildings, or dense crowds, the contrast intensified its visibility. The color produced a strong visual figure-ground relation: protesters stood out from their surroundings and became immediately photographable. This is one reason why the image of the woman in a pink hijab at a police line could function as both public evidence and an emotionally compelling scene.

Sturken and Cartwright's concept of the "practice of looking" helps clarify that visibility is never neutral (2009). Images do not merely show events; they organize relations between viewers, subjects, and institutions. Pink redistributed attention by changing who appeared as a plausible political actor. Homemakers, hijab-wearing women, young designers, and ordinary citizens were not incidental background figures. Through the visual coherence of the movement, they became central to the public image of dissent. The politics of looking therefore involved a struggle over recognition: who could be seen as courageous, whose suffering could become politically legible, and what kind of body could represent resistance.

The movement’s transfer of the same signifiers from streets to profiles, posters, memes, hashtags, and short videos enabled second-order meanings to scale through networked media. Digital circulation expanded the movement beyond the physical protest site and permitted low-cost forms of participation. Changing a profile image, sharing a poster, or using a hashtag could place an individual within the movement’s visual public. These actions should not automatically be equated with sustained political commitment, but neither should they be dismissed as merely symbolic. Digital practices helped synchronize attention, reproduce the counter-sign, and maintain connections between moments of embodied mobilization (Laksana and Abduh 2023; Miarta 2024).

“My friends and I created pink templates for Instagram and Twitter/X. They were easy to use: people could replace their profile photographs with a pink frame. Solidarity could therefore go viral even when not everyone was able to join the street protest. It was a digital communication strategy—pink became a visual code that was easy to remember”
(Digital poster designer, age 23).

The same media logics that accelerate recognition also produce risks. First, visual platforms reward simplicity, contrast, emotional immediacy, and reproducibility. These qualities make pink highly circulable but encourage the compression of complex demands into a single attractive image. Second, journalistic and platform attention can privilege the “pink protest” as a visual event while marginalizing discussions of economic and labor policy. Third, influencers or commercial actors may reproduce the aesthetic without accepting the movement’s political commitments. The symbol can then become content, style, or branding rather than a vehicle for accountability. Park’s discussion of disinformation is relevant because rapid circulation also creates opportunities for reframing, misattribution, and the detachment of images from their original contexts (Park 2024).

The movement’s response to these risks was not to reject visibility but to discipline it through anchorage. Pink images were paired with the 17+8 demands in captions, placards, chants, and interviews. This practice created a reciprocal relation between image and argument: the color attracted attention, while the text directed interpretation. The case therefore demonstrates that successful digital symbolism depends on a balance between openness and specificity. A symbol must be open enough to invite identification, but specific enough to resist political emptying. The movement’s challenge is to preserve this balance as images move through media environments it cannot fully control.

Everyday Protagonists: Gendered Care, Economic Grievance, and Moral Legitimacy

The public prominence of the 45-year-old homemaker participant demonstrates how an everyday protagonist can condense structural concerns into a socially recognizable figure. In her interview, she identified herself as the woman who wore the pink hijab and was subsequently photographed and interpreted by other participants as an embodiment of “Brave Pink.” Her account therefore directly connects lived experience, bodily presence, and the public construction of the symbol.

“I came wearing a pink hijab. At first, it was simply the color of the hijab I already owned. But many people photographed me and said that I had become a symbol of ‘Brave Pink.’ I was surprised, but also proud. It felt as though the voices of mothers like me were finally considered important within the movement” (Homemaker participant, age 45).

The quotation shows that symbolic prominence was not fully planned by the participant. Pink’s meaning emerged relationally: a personal clothing choice was photographed, circulated, named, and attached to the movement by others. This process demonstrates that re-signification is collectively produced rather than controlled by a single actor. The participant became publicly legible as a political subject because the pink hijab connected an ordinary, culturally familiar figure with the visual grammar of resistance.

Her visibility also widened the movement’s moral and social address. Political discourse often separates the “ordinary citizen” from the “activist,” casting activism as the domain of professional organizers, students, or ideologically committed groups. The pink-hijab participant disrupted this distinction. Her presence enabled women managing households and care obligations to recognize protest as compatible with their own identities. Entering the street did not require abandoning maternal, religious, or domestic roles; those positions could instead become grounds for public claim-making and demands for institutional accountability.

This is an important feminist finding. Care is frequently feminized and privatized, while formal political action is coded as public and masculine. The movement’s visual politics unsettled that division. By making a homemaker in a pink hijab one of its recognizable figures, the movement reframed the social capacities associated with care—attention to family needs, protection, responsibility, and collective well-being—as resources for civic courage. Pink did not empower the participant by erasing femininity. It collectivized a feminized social position and made it visible as a legitimate source of political agency.

The politics of relatability nevertheless remains ambivalent. Media attention can widen identification while reducing a complex participant to a morally appealing image. The homemaker may be remembered as “the woman in the pink hijab” while her interpretations, agency, and the movement’s policy demands recede from view. The political value of the image therefore depends on narrative anchorage: photographs must remain connected to participants’ accounts, the 17+8 demands, and the institutional conditions being contested. Relatability becomes analytically and politically meaningful when it moves audiences from emotional recognition toward an understanding of how ordinary lives are shaped by public power.

Gender, Faith, and Respectability: Building an Inclusive Coalition

Pink also opened a coalition space at the intersection of gender, faith, and respectability. For women who must negotiate social expectations about proper public behavior, political participation can carry reputational costs. A pink hijab offered a culturally familiar and religiously legible form through which dissent could be expressed. Its presence challenged the binary that positions piety and protest as mutually exclusive. Calls for justice, institutional integrity, and economic accountability were represented not as departures from faith-informed respectability but as expressions of moral responsibility.

This does not mean that pink had the same meaning for all religious women or that respectability politics is inherently emancipatory. Respectability can discipline women by rewarding socially approved appearances and marginalizing those who do not conform. Yet within the movement, participants strategically used familiar signs to widen access to public protest. The hijab and the color pink reduced the symbolic distance between the activist and the “ordinary” woman, allowing civic opposition to appear compatible with identities that might otherwise be cast as private or apolitical. This strategic intelligibility helped broaden the movement’s coalition.

An intersectional reading is necessary because the symbol condensed several positions simultaneously. The pink hijab indexed gender, religion, age, class, care responsibility, and economic vulnerability. None of these dimensions can fully explain its effect on its own. The image became powerful because it brought them together in a single public figure. Indonesian gender-based movements have often had to negotiate heterogeneous constituencies and unequal social locations (Reftantia, Jendrius, and Maihasni 2022). The 17+8 case shows that

visual symbols can facilitate such negotiation by creating a shared register without requiring the erasure of difference.

The movement's inclusivity therefore rested less on a universal identity than on a politics of translation. Pink translated between feminist claims and household concerns, youth culture and older generations, online aesthetics and street action, piety and dissent, emotional identification and policy critique. Translation did not eliminate tension. Rather, it made different experiences mutually recognizable within a common project. This capacity is one reason the symbol could connect the movement to wider aspirations concerning gender equality, reduced inequalities, and accountable institutions without becoming reducible to any single issue.

Community Engagement and the Durability of Symbolic Politics

The findings indicate that color alone cannot sustain a movement. Pink created visibility and lowered barriers to recognition, but the durability of its meaning depended on community engagement. Field materials pointed to conversation circles, the sharing of information, water distribution, first-aid support, and the translation of the 17+8 demands into locally resonant concerns such as food prices, employment, and education. These practices turned a visual public into a relational public. Participants did not merely display the same symbol; they enacted mutual responsibility around it.

This distinction between symbolic exposure and organizational durability is essential. A campaign can achieve substantial online visibility while lacking the social relations needed for sustained action. In the 17+8 People's Movement, pink operated as an entry point into relations of coordination and care. Mutual aid demonstrated that the movement's language of care was not only rhetorical. It was materialized in practices that protected participants and supported their continued presence. The re-signification of pink was therefore credible because the movement performed the social values it attached to the color.

Community engagement also created accountability loops between protest sites, neighborhoods, and digital forums. Images circulating online could be interpreted through face-to-face discussion, while local experiences could be brought back into digital narratives. This recursive movement limited the concentration of interpretive authority in media organizations or influencers. Meanings were negotiated through repeated interaction rather than imposed once by a central campaign. Such distributed meaning-making increased resilience because the

symbol could be adapted to different contexts while remaining connected to a broader political vocabulary.

The durability of the symbol will depend on whether these relations persist after peaks of mobilization. Visual repertoires often outlive the organizations that produce them, but their political content may weaken over time. If pink remains tied to community education, documentation, intergenerational dialogue, and concrete policy advocacy, it may continue to function as an archive of collective struggle. If it survives only as a recognizable aesthetic, it risks becoming a nostalgic or commercial residue. The sociological question is therefore not simply whether the symbol continues to circulate, but which social relations, memories, and institutions continue to authorize its meaning.

Contribution to Global South and Southern Sociological Perspectives

The 17+8 People’s Movement contributes to Global South and Southern sociological perspectives by shifting Indonesia from the status of an empirical location to that of a site of conceptual production. Much mainstream scholarship has historically organized an unequal division of intellectual labor in which metropolitan theory supplies universal concepts while societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America supply cases, illustrations, or deviations. Connell describes this hierarchy as part of the global dynamics of knowledge in which theory is disproportionately authorized by institutions of the metropole, even when its claims are built on partial histories and experiences (Connell 2007). Alatas similarly criticizes Eurocentrism, academic dependency, and the “captive mind” that reproduces imported categories without sufficiently reconstructing them through Asian historical and social experience (Alatas 2006).

A Southern perspective does not require rejecting every concept developed in Europe or North America. This study uses Barthes’s semiotics and visual culture theory because they illuminate important dimensions of the data. The Southern intervention lies in refusing a one-way relation of application. The Indonesian case does not merely confirm that signs have denotative and connotative meanings. It modifies what counts as politically significant within semiotic analysis. Pink’s re-signification is produced through a configuration of maternal care, Muslim respectability, household economic pressure, youthful digital creativity, and distrust of state performance. These relations cannot be treated as local decoration added to an already complete theory. They generate concepts about how visual resistance works.

The first concept emerging from the case is the care-based counter-sign. Pink becomes oppositional without discarding its association with care. In much political sociology,

resistance is implicitly modeled through repertoires of confrontation, disruption, organization, and strategic calculation. The 17+8 case demonstrates that a feminized affect can itself become a technology of confrontation. Care does not soften the demand for accountability; it establishes the moral grounds on which accountability is demanded. The political reversal occurs because practices often relegated to the private sphere—protecting children, managing household needs, sustaining community, and expressing concern—are reconstructed as forms of public judgment. This concept is generated from the social relations visible in the Indonesian movement and can travel comparatively without claiming to be universally identical in every setting.

The second contribution is the idea of vernacular semiotic infrastructure. Symbols in this case are not free-floating texts interpreted only by audiences. They are embedded in relationships among protest bodies, chants, religious clothing, household narratives, platform practices, and mutual aid. “Vernacular” does not mean isolated, traditional, or untouched by global media. It refers to meaning produced through locally intelligible combinations of signs and practices. Pink moves across global platforms, but its political force is reconstructed through Indonesian terms of motherhood, piety, economic struggle, and civic obligation. The case therefore challenges developmental accounts that imagine digital activism in the Global South as a delayed imitation of Northern movements. It shows a hybrid political modernity in which global media technologies are reorganized through local moral worlds.

This insight resonates with Comaroff and Comaroff’s call to theorize from, rather than merely about, the South (2012). Conditions often treated as peripheral can disclose broader transformations in politics, media, and collective life. The 17+8 movement reveals how contemporary resistance increasingly depends on the interaction of street presence, platform circulation, aesthetic labor, and everyday care. These dynamics are not exclusive to Indonesia. They illuminate a wider political condition in which legitimacy struggles unfold through compressed images and networked publics, while institutional distrust is interpreted through intimate experiences of economic insecurity. Theory developed from this “ex-centric” location can therefore explain processes that also occur beyond the geographical South.

The third contribution concerns epistemic authority. De Sousa Santos argues that social injustice is inseparable from cognitive injustice: dominant systems waste or render absent forms of knowledge produced in marginalized struggles (Santos 2014). The testimonies in this study should therefore not be treated only as raw material from which researchers extract a

theoretical interpretation. Participants were themselves engaged in analysis. The homemaker connected rising prices, children’s needs, labor policy, and governmental injustice. The field activist interpreted youth participation as a turning point. The digital artist’s practices linked visual design to broader mobilization. Their accounts contain diagnoses of power, legitimacy, communication, and collective agency. Recognizing this analytical labor is part of an epistemology that takes movement actors seriously as producers of social knowledge.

This recognition also requires methodological caution. A Southern perspective is not achieved simply because research takes place in Indonesia or because local actors are celebrated. The Global South is internally differentiated by class, gender, religion, region, digital access, and organizational power. Romanticizing “local knowledge” can conceal exclusions within movements and reproduce a homogeneous image of the South. The present study’s three interviews provide analytically rich but limited perspectives. They illuminate mechanisms of meaning-making, but they cannot represent the entire movement. A Southern sociology must therefore combine epistemic redistribution with reflexivity about whose knowledge becomes visible, whose interpretation is amplified, and whose experience remains absent.

The case also contributes to Alatas and Sinha’s project of moving sociological theory beyond a narrow canon (Lowery 2020). Rather than adding the 17+8 movement as another national example under a pre-established theory of visual protest, the article proposes that its practices can reorganize the conceptual vocabulary of social movements. Collective identity appears here not only as cognitive identification or organizational belonging, but as chromatic recognition anchored in care. Political participation appears not only as entry into a public sphere separated from domestic life, but as the extension of reproductive labor into claims on the state. Digital activism appears not simply as online mobilization, but as circulation between embodied protest, platform visibility, and community interpretation. These formulations emerge from the case and broaden the analytic possibilities of sociology.

Finally, the study offers a relational rather than essentialist understanding of the Global South. “South” should not be reduced to geography or treated as a culturally unified location. It identifies unequal positions within global histories of colonialism, capitalism, and knowledge production, while also pointing to intellectual projects that challenge those inequalities. The 17+8 People’s Movement is globally connected: it uses commercial platforms, recognizable protest forms, and transnational languages of gender equality and social justice. Yet it does not simply reproduce global scripts. Participants reassemble these resources through situated

experiences of Indonesian political communication, religious identity, youth culture, and household economy. The Southern contribution lies in this capacity to provincialize assumed universals and produce theory from connected but unequal worlds.

Seen from this perspective, pink is more than a successful campaign color. It is an epistemic object through which participants explain the relationship between private hardship and public power, gendered identity and civic courage, visual familiarity and political innovation, local moral worlds and global media infrastructures. The movement demonstrates that theory can emerge from the practical work of re-signifying everyday objects. By tracing that work, this article contributes a Southern sociology of visual resistance: one that understands symbols as relational infrastructures, recognizes care as a political capacity, and treats movement actors in Indonesia as theorists of the conditions they contest.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the 17+8 People's Movement did not simply adopt pink as a visual identifier; it transformed the color into a relational infrastructure of resistance. Through the coordinated use of clothing, hijabs, flags, slogans, profile frames, posters, and digitally circulating images, participants converted a culturally familiar sign into a counter-sign of solidarity, civic courage, and nonviolent refusal. Pink lowered the threshold of recognition, enabled strangers to identify one another as participants, and connected street-level mobilization with networked publics. Its political force came from a mythic reversal in which softness was recoded as discipline, care as public protection, and femininity as a source of political authority rather than passivity.

The findings further show that visual politics derived its durability from the social relations surrounding it. Youth creativity expanded the movement's repertoire, but household economic grievances, maternal responsibility, religious respectability, mutual aid, and community interpretation gave the symbol moral and organizational depth. The figure of the homemaker in a pink hijab made structural concerns about prices, labor, and governmental accountability publicly relatable without reducing participants to passive victims. At the same time, the study identifies the vulnerability of rapidly circulating symbols to aestheticization, decontextualization, and commercial appropriation. The movement's consistent pairing of pink imagery with explicit 17+8 demands provides an important strategy of anchorage, although the

long-term political meaning of the color will depend on whether community relations and policy advocacy persist beyond moments of heightened visibility.

From a Southern sociological perspective, the Indonesian case should be understood not merely as an application of established semiotic or social movement theories but as a source of conceptual innovation. The study develops the ideas of the care-based counter-sign and vernacular semiotic infrastructure to explain how feminized affect, religiously legible identities, household experience, digital aesthetics, and collective action are assembled into political force. These concepts challenge the metropolitan division of intellectual labor that reserves theory for the Global North and empirical particularity for the South (Alatas 2006; Connell 2007). They also recognize movement participants as producers of social knowledge whose interpretations of economic insecurity, state legitimacy, and visual communication are integral to theory formation (Santos 2014). Future research should examine how these processes vary across regions, classes, religious communities, and platform environments, while also investigating whether the re-signification of pink can endure, travel, or be reconstructed in other struggles without losing its grounding in the experiences and demands that gave it political meaning.

REFERENCES

- Afifah, Istiyana, Dhea Arisati, Nanindhita Nur Khasanah, Desti Nadya Amanda, and Rizqan Kariema Mustafa. 2025. "The Women's Dual Roles: Case Study of Informal Sector Working Mothers". *Journal of Southern Sociological Studies* 1 (1):40-56. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsss.v1i1.40860>.
- Alatas, Syed Farid. 2006. *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism*. New Delhi, India: Sage.
- Aliwy Mohammed, H., R. H. Kareem, A. Z. Mkhelif, and I. Aliwi Mohamme. 2024. "A Semiotic Analysis of the Verbal and Non-Verbal Slogans Used in the Day of Ashura." *مجلة كلية التربية*. <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.vol56.iss1.3940>
- Alturas, C. J., J. K. Balanza, P. L. Cabalse, K. J. Ignacio, A. J. Killip, and K. C. Nicdao. 2024. "Political Branding: The Use of Campaign Color as Symbolism of Platforms among the Presidential Candidates in the 2022 Elections." *Diversitas Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.48017/dj.v9ispecial1.2831>
- Amin, R., and H. Nath. 2023. "Environmental Justice and Education: Bridging the Gap between Ecology, Equity, and Access." *Journal of Advanced Zoology*. <https://doi.org/10.17762/jaz.v44is-3.1061>
- Awad, S.H., and Wagoner, n.d. "Protest Symbols." <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.03.007>
- Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 2012. *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

- Connell, Raewyn. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003117346>
- Doerr, Nicole. 2014. "Memory and Culture in Social Movements." Pp. 206–226 in *Conceptualizing Culture in Social Movement Research*, edited by Britta Baumgarten, Priska Daphi, and Peter Ullrich. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137385796_10
- Gupta, A. 2024. "Pink: A Language of Communication for Feminism." <https://doi.org/10.58532/v3bkso18p2ch4>
- Hussein, J. 2018. "Exploring Inequities, Inspiring New Knowledge and Action." *Reproductive Health Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09688080.2018.1545438>
- Kann, C., Z. C. Steinert-Threlkeld, and R. M. Alvarez. 2023. "Collective Identity in Collective Action: Evidence from the 2020 Summer BLM Protests." *Frontiers in Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2023.1185633>
- Laksana, M. W., and M. Abduh. 2023. "The Power of Social Movements: Activism in the Age of Connectivity." <https://doi.org/10.15575/jcspi.v1i1.441>
- Lipenga, T. 2024. "Painting the Town Red during the Academic Freedom Saga in Malawi." <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003516248-18>
- Lowery, G. 2020. "Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha, *Sociological Theory Beyond the Canon*." *Critical Research on Religion* 8(3):324–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303220952879>
- Lu, C. 2023. "The Impact of Instagram on Feminist Activism." *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/30/20231603>
- Miarta, W. M. 2024. *Media Sosial dalam Society 5.0: Menavigasi Konektivitas Manusia di Era Digital*. Kalimantan Selatan, Indonesia: Ruang Karya.
- Naduvanamath, J. 2024. "Understanding the Role of Grassroots Movements in Modern Political Processes." *ShodhKosh Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i4.2024.3740>
- Nugraha, M. V. A., and A. F. Lubis. 2024. "Assessing the Influence of Social Justice Movements on Public Policy and Community Empowerment in Indonesia." <https://doi.org/10.58812/eslhr.v3i01.353>
- Nyamari, T. 2024. "The Role of Visual Arts in Social Movements." *International Journal of Humanity and Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.47941/ijars.2071>
- Park, A. 2024. "The Battle against Disinformation." <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009373272.015>
- Reftantia, G., Jendrius, and Maihasni. 2022. "The Map of Gender-Based Social Movement to Realizing Gender Equality and Justice in Indonesia." <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.30-8-2021.2316278>
- Rofi'ah, Addawiatur Rofi'ah, and Luxy Nabela Farez. 2025. "The Ideal Mother in Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Maternal Roles in National News Articles". *Journal of Southern Sociological Studies* 1 (3):284-303. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jsss.v1i3.45517>.
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2014. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315634876>
- Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. 2009. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sulistiani, S., and I. A. Indriyany. 2024. "Ecofeminism: Women's Resistance to the Development of a Geothermal Power Plant Project in Padarincang, Serang Regency." *Deleted Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.62503/gr.v2i2.19>
- Technology Access Foundation. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003286998-4>