

Tilik and the Tradition of Visiting: Representing Javanese Local Culture in a Semiotic Study of a Short Film

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Article history: Received: 25 January 2024 | Revised: 17 April 2024 | Accepted: 17 May 2024 |
Published: 1 June 2024

Article type: Research Article

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33292/locus.v2i02.14>

ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
The tradition of <i>tilik</i>, the collective visiting of a sick relative or neighbour, is a form of Javanese local wisdom still widely practised, and it functions as a social space in which collective values such as <i>guyub</i> (togetherness) and <i>rukun</i> (harmony) are sustained. This article examines how the short film <i>Tilik</i> (2018), directed by Wahyu Agung Prasetyo, represents that tradition while simultaneously exposing <i>rasan-rasan</i> (gossip) as a cultural practice that accompanies it. The study applies a descriptive qualitative design grounded in the triadic semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce and in the orders of signification proposed by Roland Barthes. The corpus is the complete thirty-two-minute film, from which eighteen key scenes were selected against three explicit criteria and coded independently by the two authors before being synthesised into five narrative stages. The analysis finds that gossip in the film works in two directions at once: as a social adhesive that reinforces the solidarity of the group, and as an informal mechanism of control over women's bodies and reputations that requires no formal authority. The escalation stage occupies the largest share of the analysed scenes, which indicates that the production of gossip, rather than the act of visiting, is the film's principal narrative engine. The narrative irony of the closing scenes, in which the entire construction of gossip is shown to be false, operates as a reflexive critique of <i>rasan-rasan</i> culture that does not negate the value of <i>guyub-rukun</i> embedded in the visiting tradition. The article contributes a two-tiered reading model, moving from scene to narrative structure, and situates a culturally specific Javanese practice within the comparative literature on gossip as a near-universal social form.	<i>guyub-rukun</i> Javanese local culture <i>rasan-rasan</i> semiotics short film  This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

How to cite: Luthfi R., A. (2024). Tilik and the tradition of visiting: Representing Javanese local culture in a semiotic study of a short film. *Journal of Local Culture Studies*, 2(1), 67–80. <https://doi.org/10.33292/locus.v2i02.14>

INTRODUCTION

Tilik is an oral and social tradition of the Javanese people in which relatives, neighbours, or community figures collectively visit someone who is ill or has suffered misfortune. The practice is not merely a personal call at a sickbed; it is a collective undertaking that affirms *guyub* (togetherness) and *rukun* (harmony) as the foundation of communal life in rural Java (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). It is typically spontaneous and unscheduled, triggered by news of grief or misfortune befalling a member of the community, and it involves rapid collective mobilisation rather than the deliberate planning of a formal visit. That spontaneity has a material consequence: a group assembles at short notice and travels together in whatever vehicle happens to be available, often for a considerable distance and a considerable time.

The social space so produced is not neutral. When a group of neighbours is confined together for an hour in a single open vehicle, the same conditions that make solidarity visible also make possible a more ambivalent cultural practice, namely *rasan-rasan*, the talking-over of an absent third party. The short film *Tilik* (2018), directed by Wahyu Agung Prasetyo, captures this ambivalence in a manner at once humorous and sharp. Running approximately thirty-two minutes, produced by Ravacana Films with support from the Yogyakarta Provincial Cultural Office, the film won the Piala Maya award for Best Selected Short Film in 2018 and was an official selection at the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival 2018 and at World Cinema Amsterdam 2019. Its plot is deceptively simple: a group of village women rides an open-bed truck to visit Bu Lurah, the village head's wife, who is hospitalised, yet throughout the journey the act of visiting is displaced by an intensive conversation about a young woman named Dian. Following its release on a public video platform, the film became a national phenomenon, largely because audiences recognised in it a representation that closely mirrored their own social reality.

Scholarship on the film has accumulated quickly and falls into four discernible positions. The first is narratological: Nurhablisyah and Susanti (2020) read the film through Bordwell's account of narrative form (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001) and show that the confined space of the truck bed operates as the engine of the conflict. The second is sociological: Heppiyani et al. (2021) treat the gossip in *Tilik* explicitly as a form of social control, foregrounding Bu Tejo's economic position and her access to information as the sources of her gossiping authority. The third is concerned with gender and language: Masyitoh and Adnan (2021) analyse the representation of women through Barthesian semiotics and find it both complex and inflected by patriarchal ideology, while Hasanah and Wicaksono (2021) examine the linguistic characteristics of the film's female speech as a marker of gender and cultural identity. The fourth is textual and receptive: Tirtamenda (2021) examines language play and Barthes' semiotic codes in the dialogue in order to recover the film's moral message, and Kusdi (2021) studies how a particular community received the women's behaviour on screen.

Taken together, these studies establish two things. They confirm that gossip and the representation of women constitute the semiotic core of the film, and they demonstrate that Peircean and Barthesian analysis can be applied productively to it. What they share, however, is a procedure: each maps signs scene by scene and stops there, without synthesising the results into a reading of how the meaning of the gossip shifts across the film as a whole. Gossip is treated as a topic standing on its own, detached from its cultural root in the visiting tradition that produced the occasion for it.

A second limitation is comparative. Anthropological and social-psychological scholarship has long argued that gossip is neither a distinctively Javanese nor a distinctively cinematic phenomenon. Gluckman's (1963) account of gossip and scandal as boundary-maintaining mechanisms within tightly bound communities, Foster's (2004) taxonomy of its information-sharing, entertainment, bonding, and social-control functions, and Dunbar's (2004)

evolutionary account of gossip as a verbal substitute for physical grooming in groups too large for one-to-one contact converge on the view that gossip is a near-universal social practice whose local expressions vary while its underlying functions recur. None of the six studies of *Tilik* discussed above engages this literature. Each treats the film's gossip either as a self-contained narrative device or as a specifically Javanese symptom, and the question of what is local and what is general in the practice is therefore never posed. Work on the internalisation of Javanese local wisdom in contemporary institutional settings (Prabowo et al., 2023), together with the classic account of Javanese ethical life given by Magnis-Suseno (1997), indicates that *guyub* and *rukun* remain live analytical categories across present-day contexts, audiovisual media included, and that the comparative question is worth asking.

The gap is therefore twofold and methodological as much as substantive: the existing scholarship has not positioned the visiting tradition and gossip as two interwoven facets of a single cultural phenomenon unfolding in a single social space, and it has not read the film's culturally marked representation of *rasan-rasan* against the comparative record of gossip as a documented cross-cultural practice. This article is the first to combine a scene-level semiotic analysis of *Tilik* with a narrative-stage synthesis of the whole film and to read the resulting pattern against the comparative anthropology of gossip.

The study accordingly asks how the semiotic signs of the short film *Tilik* represent the visiting tradition as a Javanese cultural practice; how those signs construct, escalate, and finally dismantle the practice of gossip that accompanies it; and what the resulting pattern shows about the relation between a locally specific expression of gossip and the functions of gossip reported elsewhere.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

The study adopts a descriptive qualitative design with a semiotic approach, appropriate to a research question that concerns how meaning is produced in an audiovisual text rather than how frequently something occurs within it (Sugiyono, 2008; Suharsimi, 2013). The subject of the study is the short film *Tilik* by Wahyu Agung Prasetyo (2018); the object is the meaning carried by its plot, scenes, dialogue, characters, and visual composition.

Two theoretical frameworks are brought to bear, and they enter the analysis at different points. Peirce (1931–1935) conceives semiotics as the formal study of signs operating through a triadic relation among sign, object, and interpretant (Sobur, 2006; Vera, 2014), and he further classifies signs by their relation to the object as icon, index, and symbol (Budiman, 2011). This trichotomy is applied first, at the level of the individual scene: a character's facial expression that directly conveys a social disposition is read as iconic; noise issuing from the truck bed, as indexical of the activity within it; the myth of tying the toe, as symbolic, since it signifies only within a specific framework of local belief. Barthes (1972) is applied second, to move from the sign to its cultural charge through denotation and connotation (Kusumarini et al., 2006; Sobur, 2009), and then to myth, the third order at which a connotation already established within a culture comes to appear natural and beyond question (Pilliang, 2018). Representation, in the sense given it by Fisk (2004) and elaborated by Hall (1997), supplies the premise that this process is never neutral: every choice of angle, duration, and cut shapes a particular meaning for the viewer. Finally, *guyub* and *rukun* (Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Prabowo et al., 2023) are used not as objects of description but as an evaluative lens, against which the film's practice of visiting is assessed for authenticity or distortion.

Because the study draws on both Peirce's triadic model and Barthes' two-level model, the relation between them requires clarification, since they do not share a theoretical lineage. Peirce's interpretant is a relational concept internal to a triadic structure: it is the effect a sign

produces in an interpreting mind, and it may itself become a further sign in an open-ended chain. Barthes' connotation belongs instead to a code-based model built on Saussurean and Hjelmslevian linguistics, in which a second sign-system is constructed upon an already-constituted first one (Barthes, 1972; Hall, 1997). The two are not interchangeable. In this study the interpretant is operationalised through connotation, because the object of analysis is a culturally coded audiovisual text produced for, and read within, a determinate interpretive community – Javanese and Indonesian audiences familiar with the conventions of *guyub-rukun* sociality – rather than an unbounded chain of individual interpretants. This is an operational decision, not a claim of theoretical identity, and it is what licenses the reporting of the two in a single column in the analysis below.

Corpus, Period, and Unit of Analysis

The corpus consists of a single complete work: the thirty-two-minute film in its publicly released version, which is freely accessible on the producer's official video channel. The film was viewed in full repeatedly during the preparation of the manuscript, which was completed in January 2024, and dialogue was transcribed from the original Javanese with reference to the Indonesian subtitles supplied by the producer.

From this corpus, eighteen key scenes were selected as the unit of analysis. Because the film comprises considerably more shot and scene units than eighteen, the set must be understood as a purposive analytical subset rather than an exhaustive segmentation. Three inclusion criteria were applied: a scene was retained if it marked a significant shift in the trajectory of the gossip; if it displayed an explicit marker of local culture, such as a myth or a Javanese-language expression; or if it functioned as a transition point between narrative stages. Scenes serving only as connective or establishing material, with no bearing on any of the three criteria, were excluded. The criteria were fixed before coding began, in order to limit the subjectivity that otherwise attends the selection of evidence in interpretive work.

Data Collection

Data were collected by documentation technique (Herdiansyah, 2010; Mulyana & Solatun, 2013). Three activities produced the material analysed. Repeated close viewing of the film with timecode logging produced the scene inventory and the eighteen selected units, each recorded with its timestamp. Frame capture produced still images of the selected scenes for the analysis of composition, gesture, and facial expression, and the corresponding audio and dialogue were transcribed for the analysis of verbal signs. A review of the semiotic and anthropological literature produced the secondary material against which the interpretation was subsequently tested. Primary data thus consist of image excerpts and audio elements drawn from the film itself; secondary data consist of the books, journal articles, and prior studies cited throughout.

Data Validation and Analysis

Analysis proceeded in two stages. The first is micro-level and proceeds scene by scene, applying the Peircean triad and the trichotomy of icon, index, and symbol to identify the sign, and then Barthes' orders of signification to establish what the sign denotes and what it connotes for the interpretive community described above. The output of this stage is the scene-level matrix reported as Table 1. The second stage is macro-level and synthetic: the eighteen coded scenes were grouped into five narrative stages – opening, escalation, complication, climax, and resolution – and the dominant denotation and connotation of each stage were derived from the coded scenes falling within it. The output of this stage is reported as Table 2. The purpose of the second stage is to recover the direction in which the meaning of the gossip travels across the film, which a collection of independently analysed scenes cannot by itself disclose.

Two complementary procedures were used to establish the credibility of the analysis. The first is investigator triangulation (Kriyantono, 2009; Suprayogo & Tobroni, 2001). Each of the eighteen scenes was coded independently by both authors using the categories set out above; the two sets of codes were then compared, and every discrepancy was discussed and reconciled before the scenes were grouped into narrative stages, so that the synthesis rests on agreed rather than individual readings. The second is a literature-based plausibility check: the resulting interpretation was compared against the published findings of the six prior studies of the same film, and the points of agreement and divergence are reported explicitly in the discussion below rather than left implicit.

Research Ethics and Positionality

The study involved no human participants, no fieldwork with a community, and no collection of personal data; it is a textual analysis of a completed work that its producer has released publicly and without charge. Ethical approval from an institutional board was therefore neither required nor sought. Frame captures are reproduced, where they are reproduced at all, only within the limits of fair dealing for criticism and review, and are attributed to creator, title, and year. No individual depicted in the film is discussed as a private person; the discussion concerns characters and the performances that realise them.

Both authors teach film and television production at an Indonesian arts institute in Yogyakarta and are long-term residents of the cultural region the film depicts. This position carries an evident advantage in reading Javanese-language dialogue, register, and the implicit conventions of *guyub-rukun* sociality, and an equally evident risk of reading the film as insiders who share the norms it dramatises. The two-coder procedure described above was adopted partly for this reason, and the reading offered here is presented as one defensible interpretation rather than as the film's single true meaning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Visiting as a Collective Social Space

The film's opening scenes show a group of women boarding an open truck bound for the hospital, accompanied by lively Javanese chatter. Denotatively the scene signifies a physical journey toward the object of a visit. Connotatively, the laughter-filled atmosphere and the willingness to travel together in an unsuitable vehicle rather than separately in private ones represent *guyub* and kinship as a form of social capital: visiting, in this film, is understood as a communal rather than an individual act. This reading is consistent with Magnis-Suseno's (1997) account of Javanese sociality, in which the value of an action lies substantially in its collective performance.

That same collective space, however, is also the vessel of a more ambivalent mechanism. Within the earliest minutes the topic shifts from the intention of visiting Bu Lurah to the relationship between Fikri and Dian. Read semiotically, the shift indicates that the social space of visiting is never neutral: it always carries the potential to become a site for producing discourse beyond its stated purpose. The scene-level evidence for this claim, and for those that follow, is set out in Table 1, which reports the sign and interpretant identified for each of the eighteen analysed scenes.

Table 1. Sign and interpretant in the eighteen analysed scenes of the film *Tilik*

No.	Scene (timestamp)	Sign (denotation)	Interpretant (connotation)
1	Departure of the group (00:22)	The truck carries the women toward the hospital	Collective solidarity; the good intention of visiting as narrative opening

No.	Scene (timestamp)	Sign (denotation)	Interpretant (connotation)
2	Gossip about Fikri and Dian begins (00:33)	Bu Tejo and Yu Sam discuss the pair's relationship	Shift from the intention to visit toward <i>rasan-rasan</i> ; gossip as social currency
3	The driver's unease (02:39)	The driver appears tense when questioned	Index of concealed tension; collective suspicion begins to form
4	Truck heading to town (03:08)	The truck turns onto the main road	The journey continues amid talk of Dian circulating on social media
5	Bu Tejo dominates the conversation (03:23)	Expressive face and persuasive gesture	Icon of the practised gossip; informal leadership in the production of talk
6	Passing through the forest (05:01)	Loud chatter from inside the truck bed	Telephone ownership as symbol; Bu Tejo reasserts herself as the source of information
7	Yu Nah is sick (05:17)	Yu Nah is unaccustomed to riding in a four-wheeled vehicle	A neutral event reinterpreted as fresh material for gossip
8	Passing a bend (05:44)	The winding road triggers motion sickness	Collective agitation; the talk grows amid physical discomfort
9	Accusation of pregnancy (06:00)	A causal conclusion drawn from the earlier sickness	Distortion of fact into slander; gossip as control over a woman's body
10	Stop in the rice field (08:24)	The truck stops because Bu Tejo needs to urinate	The myth of tying the toe as a marker of surviving traditional belief
11	Stop at the mosque (09:38)	The group rests; a call from Dian comes in	The topic turns to the village head election; gossip meets local political interest
12	Hiding from the police (13:40)	The women crouch to avoid a checkpoint	Norm violation normalised by the group; solidarity built on a false premise
13	The truck breaks down (17:35)	Engine trouble halts the journey	Consequence of choosing the truck over a bus; onset of physical complication
14	Pushing the truck together (18:02)	The whole group pushes the stalled vehicle	Fullest representation of <i>guyub-rukun</i> ; collective physical solidarity
15	Bu Tejo and Yu Ning in conflict (18:52)	Open dispute over the truth of the talk about Dian	The slander is questioned; first crack in the group's consensus
16	Stopped by the police (23:48)	The truck is stopped for a violation, then released	Cause and effect of a rule-breaking born of the group's recklessness
17	Arrival at the hospital (27:03)	Bu Lurah cannot be visited; she is in intensive care	Failure of the original purpose of visiting; irony over the whole journey
18	Dian beside Pak Lurah (approx. 27:45)	Dian appears calm, seated beside Pak Lurah	Total reversal of connotative meaning; the group's entire construction is proven false

Note. Timestamps refer to the publicly released version of the film. The object column of the Peircean triad is not displayed separately; the classification of each sign as icon, index, or symbol is integrated into the third and fourth columns. Because the interpretant is operationalised through Barthesian connotation, as set out in the Method, the two are reported jointly in the final column. Source: authors' analysis.

The Truck Bed as an Enclosed Narrative Space

Considered as a narrative space, the open truck bed functions as a chronotope that constrains physical movement while intensifying verbal interaction. Unlike a domestic interior, which permits privacy and withdrawal, the truck bed obliges every passenger to be a participant in, or at minimum an audience for, whatever topic is circulating. This spatial constraint is structurally the precondition of the escalation that follows: Dian has, diegetically, no opportunity to answer the accusations made about her, and the other passengers have no means of leaving the conversation before the journey ends.

Reading space in this way extends conventional semiotic analysis, which tends to stop at verbal and visual signs. The truck bed can be read as a macro-level indexical sign: it signifies a rural social condition in which limited access to individual transport becomes, unexpectedly, a trigger for intensified social interaction, of a solidary and of a destructive kind alike. This finding confirms and extends Nurhablisyah and Susanti's (2020) observation that the confined space drives the film's conflict; where their account treats the space as a device of plot construction, the present reading treats it as a sign in its own right, one that signifies a material condition of rural life.

The Escalation of Gossip as Informal Social Control

In the middle sequence the character Bu Tejo emerges as the centre of gossip production. Her expressive face and persuasive gestures, an iconic sign of a woman practised at talking about others, dominate the truck bed. A trivial event — Yu Nah's motion sickness — is reinterpreted by her into an accusation that Dian is pregnant out of wedlock. Denotatively this is a free association between two unrelated events; connotatively it signifies how gossip operates as an informal mechanism of control over women's bodies and reputations, exercised without evidence and without formal standing. The pattern corresponds closely to Gluckman's (1963) finding that gossip functions as an extra-legal means by which small communities police the conduct of their own members, and it is precisely what is designated in Javanese everyday life by *rasan-rasan*.

The escalation can also be read through Peirce's trichotomy. Bu Tejo's possession of a mobile telephone functions as a symbolic sign of informational authority, since access to social media is conventionally associated in rural settings with a more established socio-economic position. Her facial expressions and gestures while speaking function as iconic signs of the disposition she embodies. The silent or wincing reactions of other characters function as indexical signs of a discomfort left unexpressed under the pressure to preserve group harmony. This combination explains why the gossip proceeds unopposed until the fourth narrative stage. The reading also qualifies Heppiyani et al. (2021), who locate the source of Bu Tejo's authority in her economic position and access to information. Economic position is a necessary condition on the present evidence but not a sufficient one: what converts it into authority is the sign work performed in the truck bed, and in particular the absence of any competing iconic performance.

Notably, no character explicitly challenges Bu Tejo's narrative during the escalation, even though several register doubt in their faces. This absence of verbal resistance can be read as a representation of the conformity pressure internal to *guyub-rukun* culture: to disagree openly with an opinion the group has come to accept, however unfounded, is to risk being seen as disruptive of collective harmony. The value of *rukun*, which should serve as a positive social adhesive, thereby contributes to the silencing of critical voices. This cultural paradox is one of the central findings of the study, and it is not reported in the prior literature on the film, which tends to treat the group's acquiescence as narrative background rather than as a culturally specific effect.

Solidarity, Norm Violation, and the Myth of Tying the Toe

The complication scenes — an abrupt stop because Bu Tejo needs to urinate, the women crouching to avoid a police checkpoint, the collective effort of pushing the stalled truck — display another face of *guyub* culture: a physical and emotional solidarity that persists in difficulty. The scene of collective pushing is the film's fullest denotative image of that value. At the same time, these scenes expose norm violations undertaken knowingly and accepted by the group as ordinary. The irony is instructive: collective solidarity can also operate as collective justification for individual wrongdoing, and the two are carried by the same sign, the group acting as one.

The myth of tying the toe, introduced at this stage, deserves particular attention. The local belief that binding the big toe suppresses the urge to urinate is a symbolic sign in the strict Peircean sense: it signifies only by convention, and only for those who hold or recognise the belief. Its presence confirms that the film inserts markers of local wisdom consistently into a plot otherwise concerned with gossip. Such small myths perform a double function, as comic relief that lightens narrative tension and as a marker of cultural authenticity that supports the film's claim to represent rural Javanese life credibly rather than decoratively. In Barthes' (1972) terms, the sequence also shows myth in its second sense at work, since the belief is neither defended nor questioned on screen: it is simply acted upon, which is the form naturalised meaning takes.

The Irony of Resolution: The Gossip Disproven

The culmination of the film's social critique lies in its closing scenes. On arriving at the hospital the group is not permitted to see Bu Lurah, who remains in intensive care, and the stated purpose of the journey goes unmet. The final scene then reveals Dian — gossiped about throughout as pregnant and compromised — seated calmly beside Pak Lurah in a context entirely unlike the one the group had constructed. Semiotically, the reversal negates the whole connotative edifice built across the preceding scenes. What has been mythologised in Barthes' third order, a connotation that acquired through repetition the appearance of objective fact, is dismantled in a single shot.

The manner of the reversal is as significant as its content. It is conveyed not through dialogue condemning Bu Tejo or the group, but through visual juxtaposition alone: Dian's composure beside Pak Lurah, with no verbal narration whatever. This can be read as a subtle critique consistent with a Javanese communicative style that avoids direct confrontation (Hoed, 2003; Magnis-Suseno, 1997). Rather than punishing its antagonist, the film leaves the audience to draw the conclusion, an approach that enacts the very value of *rukun* that it has placed under scrutiny. Tirtamenda (2021) locates the film's moral message in its dialogue and language play; the present analysis suggests the decisive moral work is done where dialogue stops.

Gender and the Distribution of Narrative Harm

The gender dimension cannot be separated from a reading of this film. Nearly every character who produces or circulates gossip is a woman, while the male characters — the driver, the police, Pak Lurah — occupy passive positions or stand outside the exchange entirely. This pattern of representation risks reinforcing the stereotype that gossip is an activity proper to women, a risk identified by Masyitoh and Adnan (2021), who find elements of patriarchal ideology in the film's representation of women. Hasanah and Wicaksono (2021) complement this by showing that the linguistic register of the female characters, notably the familiar yet sharp *ngoko* Javanese used in gossiping, marks both gender and social class. Read through Hall's (1997) account of stereotyping as a representational practice that reduces a person to a few exaggerated traits and fixes them through repetition, the film's association of gossip with its women is exactly such a practice.

The present study argues, however, that the film complicates the stereotype rather than simply endorsing it. Dian, the woman who is the object of gossip throughout, is ultimately positioned as both the party most harmed and the party the narrative most fully vindicates. This yields a second layer of gender critique: women appear not only as agents of *rasan-rasan* but as its principal casualties, and the harm is inflicted by other women. The distribution of narrative harm is therefore uneven along gendered lines in a way that a reading confined to the perpetrators would miss. Kusdi's (2021) findings on audience reception are a necessary corrective here: the meaning of this dimension is plural and varies across audience groups, and the interpretation offered above should be understood as one reading among several that the text supports.

Gossip as a Cross-Cultural Practice in Its Javanese Form

Setting these findings against the comparative literature clarifies what is culturally specific in this case and what belongs to a broader pattern. Gluckman's (1963) argument, developed from fieldwork in small-scale communities, holds that gossip is most intense precisely among those bound most closely together, and that only full members of a group have standing to gossip about one another. The truck bed reproduces this condition almost exactly: the women who talk about Dian are her neighbours and social intimates, not strangers, and the talk itself enacts and confirms that intimacy even as it damages her. Foster's (2004) fourfold taxonomy is likewise instantiated across the eighteen analysed scenes. The group treats the material as news, as a way of passing a long journey, as a bonding ritual among those present, and, most consequentially, as a means of adjudicating an absent woman's conduct.

Dunbar's (2004) evolutionary account helps explain why the confinement of the truck bed intensifies rather than merely permits this activity. If gossip is a verbal substitute for the physical grooming that binds smaller primate groups, then passengers who cannot leave the conversational circle for the duration of the journey are in effect locked into a single continuous grooming session for the better part of an hour. What the comparative literature does not explain, and what this study contributes, is the specific ethical vocabulary through which the film frames both the virtue and the danger of that shared space: *guyub* and *rukun* as the values that make the talk feel like solidarity rather than aggression, and the myth of tying the toe as a small but telling marker situating the whole practice within a recognisably Javanese belief-world rather than a culture-neutral account of small-group control. The film's ambivalence is not evidence that gossip works differently in Java from what the comparative literature predicts; it is evidence of how a widely distributed social mechanism is locally clothed, narrated, and, in this instance, criticised from within its own cultural terms.

From Scene to Structure: The Five-Stage Synthesis

Read together, the dimensions discussed above indicate that the film cannot be adequately understood through a single analytical lens. A purely gender-focused reading reduces it to a story about women's behaviour in isolation; a purely cultural reading overlooks the uneven distribution of narrative harm along gendered lines. The integrative approach adopted here is intended to hold these dimensions together rather than treat them as competing explanations. Table 2 synthesises the shift of denotative and connotative meaning across the film's five narrative stages.

Table 2. Shift of denotation and connotation across the five narrative stages

Narrative stage	Key scenes	Dominant denotation	Connotation / cultural value
Opening (S1–S2)	Departure of the group; gossip about Fikri and Dian begins	Physical journey toward the hospital	<i>Guyub-rukun</i> as the group's collective social capital

Narrative stage	Key scenes	Dominant denotation	Connotation / cultural value
Escalation (S3–S9)	The driver's unease; the talk escalates into an accusation of pregnancy	Chained conversation inside the truck bed	Gossip as an informal mechanism of social control over women
Complication (S10–S14)	Roadside stop; checkpoint evasion; breakdown and collective pushing	Technical obstacles during the journey	Solidarity coexisting with the normalisation of rule-breaking
Climax (S15–S16)	Dispute between Bu Tejo and Yu Ning; the truck stopped, then released	Open dispute over the truth of the talk	Slander as normalised symbolic violence
Resolution (S17–S18)	Bu Lurah cannot be visited; Dian proves to be close to Pak Lurah	Failure of the original purpose of the visit	Reversal of meaning: the gossip is disproven, a critique of <i>rasan-rasan</i> culture

Note. S = scene, referring to the scene numbering established in Table 1. Source: authors' analysis.

Table 2 should be read alongside Table 1. The two are complementary: the first shows the sign work at the level of individual scenes, the second the pattern of meaning-shift at the level of narrative structure. This two-tiered movement from micro to macro is the principal methodological contribution of the study relative to previous semiotic work on the film, which stops at the micro level.

The distribution of scenes across the stages is itself informative. The opening stage comprises two scenes, escalation seven, complication five, climax two, and resolution two. The largest share, seven of eighteen or roughly thirty-nine per cent of the analysed corpus, falls to escalation, which indicates that the film structurally allocates the greatest portion of its narrative duration to the production and reinforcement of gossip, far exceeding what it allots to resolution or to the dismantling of the myth. This structural finding supports the argument that gossip is not a narrative flourish but the film's principal engine, and it gives quantitative form to an intuition that prior studies state but do not demonstrate.

The synthesis shows, finally, that the visiting tradition is not represented singularly as an act of social virtue. It is a layered cultural practice: affirming *guyub* and solidarity on one side, and on the other providing the vehicle for the production and circulation of talk that harms the person spoken about. The film can accordingly be read as a cultural text that celebrates and critiques Javanese local wisdom simultaneously, and from within.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study shows that Peirce's triadic framework and Barthes' orders of signification can be combined productively with a staged narrative reading to yield a more integrative understanding of an audiovisual text than either theory applied separately at the level of the single scene. It further shows that close, culturally specific semiotic reading and the comparative literature on gossip (Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004; Gluckman, 1963) are complementary rather than competing: the comparative literature explains why gossip recurs as a social form, while the semiotic reading explains how a particular text stages, narrates, and ultimately criticises that form within a specific cultural idiom. The approach is transferable to other Indonesian short films concerned with rural social dynamics or with local practices marked by similar ambivalence.

Practically, the findings bear on media literacy education in rural and urban communities alike, particularly given the circulation of unverified information through social media. Through its narrative irony the film offers an implicit literacy lesson: that the production of social discourse, even within an atmosphere of kinship and good intention, can become a

vehicle for falsehood that harms a third party. Hall's (1997) account of representation as a practice that actively constructs rather than passively reflects social reality is useful here, because the film shows the construction of gossip step by step and can therefore function as a teaching text on how unverified claims acquire the appearance of truth. The material lends itself to character education and to digital literacy work with younger audiences exposed to a digital-era form of *rasan-rasan*.

Positioning Against Previous Studies

The findings reinforce and extend those of Heppiyani et al. (2021), who identify gossip in the film as a form of social control tied to Bu Tejo's socio-economic standing. The present study adds a dimension of local culture left implicit in that account: social control through gossip does not stand alone but grows out of a social space that is culturally legitimated as an act of virtue, and the pattern mirrors the boundary-maintaining function of gossip documented well beyond Java (Gluckman, 1963). Social control in this film operates covertly, behind a practice normatively regarded as good.

In agreement with Masyitoh and Adnan (2021), who find the representation of women complex and contradictory, the present study shows that the complexity can be specified through the five-stage framework: the women are not represented statically but shift position, from empowered subjects in the opening and complication stages, to producers and objects of gossip in the escalation and climax stages, before the narrative reverses that position at the resolution. Hasanah and Wicaksono's (2021) findings on linguistic register explain how the *ngoko* Javanese used by Bu Tejo reinforces familiarity and informal authority at once, a dimension that complements rather than duplicates the visual analysis offered here.

The sharpest divergence is from Nurhablisyah and Susanti (2020), who treat the film's narrative structure through Bordwell without addressing local culture. The present analysis shows that the same structure can be read as a moral arc running from solidarity to social control and back to a critique of that control. Bordwell and Thompson's (2001) account of classical narrative form, in which a stable situation is disturbed, complicated, and resolved through a chain of cause and effect, maps closely onto the five-stage synthesis proposed here. The framework is therefore not a departure from that narratology but a culturally attentive elaboration of it, one that reads the causal chain through the escalation and collapse of gossip rather than through plot mechanics alone.

Taken as a whole, the comparison confirms that the film has become a productive object across disciplines, from narrative studies (Nurhablisyah & Susanti, 2020) to social control (Heppiyani et al., 2021), gender representation (Masyitoh & Adnan, 2021), linguistics (Hasanah & Wicaksono, 2021), semiotic codes and moral message (Tirtamenda, 2021), and audience reception (Kusdi, 2021). The diversity of approaches demonstrates the density of meaning in a relatively short work. The present study positions itself as complementary to that body of work, with its specific contribution lying in the integration of a Javanese local-culture perspective, a cross-scene narrative synthesis, and the comparative anthropology of gossip, which have not previously been brought together.

Methodological Contribution

Beyond its substantive findings the study offers a methodological contribution in the five-stage narrative synthesis — opening, escalation, complication, climax, resolution — as an analytical instrument for the semiotic reading of narrative audiovisual texts generally. The framework departs from conventional approaches that treat each scene as an independent unit, and offers instead a way of reading the shift of meaning longitudinally across a film's duration. It is adaptable to other Indonesian short films that dramatise social dynamics within communal spaces — the neighbourhood watch post, the village shop, the rotating savings

gathering — settings that have frequently served to represent gossip culture in Indonesian cinema but have rarely been examined through an integrative synthesis of this kind.

CONCLUSION

The visiting tradition, as a Javanese local cultural practice, is represented ambivalently in this film. On one side it affirms *guyub* and *rukun* through the collective solidarity of a group of women who travel together, push a broken truck together, and endure an uncomfortable journey together. On the other, the very social space that solidarity creates becomes the vessel for the production and escalation of gossip functioning as an informal mechanism of control over a woman's body and reputation. The film delivers its critique of that mechanism through narrative irony rather than condemnation: the entire construction of gossip is shown to be false in a closing image that requires no dialogue, and the value of the tradition itself is left intact.

Three specific conclusions follow. The five-stage narrative synthesis demonstrates that the film's duration is structurally weighted toward the escalation of gossip, which accounts for the largest share of the analysed scenes and constitutes the work's principal narrative engine. The open truck bed functions not merely as a setting but as an active narrative element and a macro-level indexical sign, signifying a rural condition in which constrained transport produces intensified interaction of both a solidary and a destructive kind. And the social critique is delivered through visual juxtaposition rather than explicit judgement, a strategy consistent with the cultural preference for avoiding open confrontation that the film simultaneously subjects to scrutiny.

The contribution is twofold. Methodologically, the study offers a two-tiered reading model that moves from scene-level sign analysis to narrative-stage synthesis, and that is transferable to other narrative audiovisual texts rooted in local culture. Substantively, it shows that the representation of local culture in contemporary audiovisual media is not always affirmative: a popular-culture product can serve at once as an instrument of preservation and as a space for the critical evaluation of the practice it represents. For practitioners and educators this suggests a use for such films as reflective material on the circulation of unverified information; for scholars of local culture it suggests that traditions such as visiting repay critical rather than purely affirmative reading, since a single social space may host valued and harmful practices at once.

Three limitations qualify these claims. As a textual analysis the study does not engage audience reception, and it therefore cannot establish how viewers from differing cultural backgrounds make sense of the ambivalence identified here. Its focus on a single title limits the generalisability of the findings to the representation of Javanese local culture in Indonesian short film more broadly. And semiotic analysis, as an interpretive method, leaves room for the researcher's own subjectivity, a risk mitigated by two-coder triangulation but not eliminated by it. Subsequent research should accordingly adopt a reception approach with audiences of differing regional background, and should extend the corpus to several further short films set within Javanese culture, in order to test whether the pattern of cultural ambivalence identified here holds beyond this single case.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank the Department of Film and Television Production, Faculty of Recorded Media Arts, Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, for the academic support that made the preparation of this article possible, and the anonymous reviewers of this journal for comments that improved the argument.

DECLARATIONS

Funding. This research received no external funding.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest. Neither author has any financial, professional, or personal relationship with the director, the production company, or any individual involved in the making of the film discussed.

Ethical approval and informed consent. Not applicable. The study involved no human participants and no personal data. It analyses a completed audiovisual work released publicly by its producer, and any reproduction of frames falls within fair dealing for the purposes of criticism and review.

Data availability. The film analysed is publicly available on the producer's official video channel. The scene inventory, the timecoded coding sheets of both authors, and the transcribed dialogue are held by the corresponding author and may be consulted on reasonable request.

Use of generative artificial intelligence. The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the conception of the study, the analysis of the film, or the formation of its arguments. Such tools were used only for language editing and for preparing the manuscript to the journal's template. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this article.

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