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Cultural narratives on screen: The construction of Yogyakarta cultural values in local short films

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Abstract This study examines Yogyakarta short films construction on local cultural values through narrative structure using a qualitative narratological approach based on Tzvetan Todorov's model. Analyzing 21 province government-funded short films, the study focuses on protagonists, conflict, and resolution as key narrative elements. The findings show that these films consistently position wong cilik as protagonists whose conflicts arise from everyday social relations, including family obligations, economic constraints, and community dynamics. Disruptions are typically externally driven, while resolution is achieved through restraint, negotiation, and relational adjustment rather than confrontation. This produces a non-confrontational narrative strategy, often expressed through open-ended endings that emphasize reflection and social equilibrium. These patterns are reinforced by minimal dialogue, silence, non-professional actors, and slow pacing. Together, these elements demonstrate non-confrontational storytelling operates as the primary narrative structure.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji konstruksi nilai-nilai budaya lokal dalam film pendek Yogyakarta melalui struktur naratif dengan pendekatan naratologi kualitatif berdasarkan model Tzvetan Todorov. Menganalisis 21 film pendek yang didanai oleh pemerintah provinsi, penelitian ini memfokuskan pada protagonis, konflik, dan resolusi sebagai elemen naratif utama. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa film-film ini secara konsisten menempatkan wong cilik sebagai protagonis yang konfliknya muncul dari relasi sosial sehari-hari, termasuk kewajiban keluarga, kendala ekonomi, dan dinamika komunitas. Gangguan biasanya didorong oleh faktor eksternal, sementara resolusi dicapai melalui pengekangan, negosiasi, dan penyesuaian relasional daripada konfrontasi. Hal ini menghasilkan strategi naratif non-konfrontasional, sering diekspresikan melalui akhir cerita terbuka yang menekankan refleksi dan keseimbangan sosial. Pola-pola ini diperkuat oleh dialog minimal, keheningan, aktor non-profesional, dan tempo lambat. Secara keseluruhan, elemen-elemen ini menunjukkan bahwa bercerita non-konfrontasional beroperasi sebagai struktur naratif utama.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2000, the Yogyakarta film culture has developed significantly. Nowadays, dozens filmmaker groups actively produce films (Saputro et al., 2015) that are supported by many stakeholders such as educational institutions (Nugroho & Suwarto, 2013), film festivals (Aryanto, 2014; Habibi, 2012; Nugroho & Suwarto, 2013; Permatasari, 2014; Sasono, 2019; Setiawati, 2019; Suwarto, 2017) alternative distribution and cinema (Arifianto & Junaedi, 2014; Engchuan, 2023; Nugroho & Suwarto, 2013). The majority of film groups produce short films (Saputro et al., 2015).

A significant institutional milestone occurred in 2012 with the enactment of the Law on the Special Status of Yogyakarta (*Undang-Undang Keistimewaan*), which reaffirmed the autonomy of the local government under the authority of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta (*Kesultanan Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat*) (Harsono, 2018). One of the key implications of this law is the provision of special autonomy funds (*Dana Keistimewaan*) from the national budget, specifically allocated for the preservation and development of five priority areas, including the enhancement of local culture. These funds are channeled directly from the central government to the provincial government and have supported various initiatives, such as the revitalization of arts and culture programs.

One of the artistic fields that receives a special funding allocation from the local government is film. Under the province cultural office, the local authority actively supports various film-related initiatives, such as training workshops, public screenings, festivals, and short film productions that was extremely limited before.

A flagship program is the Film Production Funding Competition (*Kompetisi Pendanaan Produksi Film*), which aims to facilitate the production of short films that reflect the spatial, geographical, and cultural dynamics of Yogyakarta. Through this program, filmmakers are encouraged to explore local characters, everyday life, social interactions, and forms of socio-cultural resilience (Jogjafilm.com, 2019). The competition is open to public participation, fostering broader engagement among local filmmakers. Between 2014 and 2019, the initiative successfully supported the production of 50 short films. Each of the films budget was about 100-180 millions rupiah.

Despite the important role of short films in the development of Yogyakarta's film scene, academic research on this medium remains limited. Existing studies have mainly focused on cinematic practices (Engchuan, 2021; Marganingtyas & Saputro, 2007; Masduki, 2010; Saputro et al., 2015) and distribution strategies (Arifianto & Junaedi, 2014), with particular attention to independently funded productions by local film groups. In contrast, short films supported by government initiatives—such as those funded by the local Office of Culture—have received minimal scholarly attention. One exception is a study that argues government-funded short films produced through the cultural office competitions often fail to meaningfully express the cultural values tied to Yogyakarta's special political and cultural status (*keistimewaan*) (Kustanto et al., 2019).

Given the local government's consistent support for short film production, the absence of substantial academic engagement with these works

highlights a critical gap in research. This lack of attention is not confined to Yogyakarta; globally, studies on local film cultures—particularly those shaped by government initiatives—remain scarce. This is especially striking considering the growing decentralization of film production, which now extends beyond major global cities to a diverse range of provinces (Cunningham, 1994; Jäckel, 2007; Ko, 2006; Marafa et al., 2022; Pillai, 2015; Stockwell, 2012; Telles, 2020). These developments underscore the need to examine how local film initiatives participate in shaping cultural narratives at the periphery.

Prior research about local/provincial film culture discussed some important issues related to film distribution and film festival (Van Hemert & Ellison, 2015), cinematic strategies such as language, image and sound, allegory and narrative (Ko, 2006), local industrial relation with national and global film production (Gasher, 1999; Jäckel, 2007), and film policy (Lev, 1986). However, that research mostly concerns full-length films rather than short films. In fact, many developments of periphery film culture through the production of the short film which is partially subsidized by the government (Blomkamp, 2011; Morawetz, 2009). However, the discussion about the specific topic is limited. Hence it is critical to understand the local film culture through the lens of short film production.

Short film pioneers and serves an important function in contemporary film culture. The previous study in many parts of the world reveals that short films play a vital role in terms of industrial development and political expression. Many filmmakers enforce their career from short film production as a great calling card (Howe, 2004; Kelly, 2001) and embrace the international film festival circuit (Khoo,

2014). The short film is more democratic compared to the full-length film because of its flexibility (Lim, 2014). Many marginal communities exploit the medium to promote freedom of expression (Loist, 2015), articulate anti urbanization voice and marginalized local culture (Taufiqurrohman et al., 2017), identity, and indigenous construction (Blomkamp, 2011), sexual orientation (Khoo, 2014).

While previous research on film culture has addressed various aspects such as film policy, distribution, and narrative strategies, much of this scholarship centers on full-length films. In contrast, short films—especially those funded by local governments—have received limited academic attention despite their growing role in peripheral film industries. These short films often serve as a platform for cultural representation, industrial experimentation, and political expression. In the context of local film development, especially in regions where state support plays a crucial role, it is important to understand how these short films participate in constructing of local culture.

Earlier research has used the term 'local' inconsistently. The local film refers to several catchment areas such as national (country) (Aziz et al., 2015; Barker, 2019), regional (a territory that shares a similar language) (Ganti, 2012; Yeh, 2014), province (as an administrative area or a big city surrounded by a smaller satellite suburban area) (Gasher, 1999; Jäckel, 2007; Lev, 1986; Van Hemert & Ellison, 2015). The term local in this research project refers to provincial film production.

Prior research conceptualizes locality as a matter of resource employment, encompassing funding, creative labor (above the line), technical labor (below the line), story, location, production infrastructure, distribution, and market (McNutt, 2015; Szczepanik,

2014; Wasserman, 2014). While this perspective has been useful in mapping the industrial dimensions of local film production, it has largely overlooked the locality articulation at the level of film texts. As a result, there remains limited understanding of cultural values and local identities are construction and negotiation within the narratives themselves. This gap is significant, given that films not only embody locality through production processes but also through narrative forms. Addressing this limitation, this study examines how is local values are expressed in film content, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of local cinema text using industrial point of view.

In the context of local film production, understanding locality cannot be limited to industrial dimensions alone, but must also consider how cultural values are embedded and articulated within film narratives. In Yogyakarta, this cultural dimension is shaped not only by broader Javanese traditions but also by its status as a Special Region, where cultural authority remains closely linked to the Sultanate and institutional practices. This configuration positions Yogyakarta as a key site for the preservation and reproduction of Javanese cultural values within contemporary cultural production, including film.

Within this context, Yogyakarta cultural identity is deeply rooted in Javanese philosophy, particularly the syncretic belief system known as *Kejawen*. This worldview blends elements of animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, and emphasizes inner harmony, spiritual awareness, and balance between the individual, society, and the cosmos (Geertz, 1976). Although no longer practiced formally as a religion, its ethical principles continue to shape social behavior and cultural expression.

In Yogyakarta, these values are not only embedded in everyday practices but are also reproduced through cultural production. They are reflected in practices such as *tata krama* (etiquette), *rukun* (social harmony), and respect for hierarchy (Koentjaraningrat, 1994), as well as in ethical orientations such as *eling* (self-awareness) and *prihatin* (self-restraint) (Suseno, 1984).

At the heart of this philosophical framework is the concept of *hamemayu hayuning bawana*, which refers to the commitment to maintaining harmony in both social and cosmic life (Jong, 1976; Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Suseno, 1984). Originating from classical Javanese literature such as *Serat Cemporet*, this principle frames ethical action as part of an individual's responsibility to sustain harmonious existence (Wanti & Setyani, 2021). Taken together, these principles form a normative system that not only guides social life in Yogyakarta but also informs how local values are constructed and circulated within film narratives as part of the region's cultural production.

One of medium that oftenly produced by Yogyakarta film practitioners is short films. This media has characteristics in terms of time span and accessibility. Film society usually defines a 'short' as a film with duration less than 30 minutes even though the international market prescribes five to fifteen minutes being the average (Blomkamp, 2009). The time limitation needs less labor and capital compared to the full-length film as a consequence the medium is more accessible for both nonprofessional and professional filmmakers. The amateur filmmakers oftenly express their opinion, political stance, experience, and other personal or group interests (Loist, 2015). While the aspiring professional film practitioners may exploit the medium as

the work experimentation or promotional tools (Howe, 2004; Kelly, 2001).

Within this cultural context, short film becomes a particularly significant medium for articulating and negotiating local values. As a form, short film is characterized by its flexibility in terms of production, narrative form, and modes of circulation. In recent decades, short films have increasingly relied on digital technologies rather than analogue formats such as super-8 mm, 16 mm, or 35 mm, enabling more accessible and efficient production processes. Their distribution and exhibition platforms are also diverse, ranging from film festivals and community screenings to television, streaming services, and social media.

This flexibility allows short films to engage with a wide range of themes, including sensitive issues and non-normative perspectives that are often less visible in mainstream feature-length cinema. In many cases, short films explore personal identities, question social norms, and represent marginalized experiences. In the Indonesian context, this has positioned short films as an important space for articulating alternative viewpoints and challenging dominant narratives (Barker, 2021; Prakosa, 2005; Ratna, 2003; Sultanika, 2021).

Research on short films funded by local governments—particularly within special autonomy contexts—remains limited, despite their growing role in cultural production. Existing studies have largely focused on industrial aspects (Mediarta, 2007; Ratna, 2007), leaving the narrative construction of cultural values within these films underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining government-funded short films construction of Yogyakarta cultural values through narrative structures.

Specifically, the study investigates local values articulation through characters, conflicts, and resolutions in the films. Drawing on narratology, the analysis focuses on construction of social relations, values, and local identity through short film narration. By situating textual analysis within the context of state-supported cultural production, this study contributes to broader discussions on short film, local film culture, and the role of narrative in articulating local cultural values.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative narrative analysis grounded in narratology of Tzvetan Todorov (1971). He conceptualizes narrative as a progression from equilibrium to disruption and ultimately to a new equilibrium, providing a systematic framework for analyzing plots development and meaning construction through stages of conflict and resolution. In addition, the study incorporates character analysis by treating characterization as a causal driver of narrative progression since conflicts arise from characters' goals and constraints, and resolutions follow from their responses (Bordwell, 1985).

Despite its origins in classical narratology, Tzvetan Todorov's framework (1971) remains relevant for contemporary film and media analysis due to its analytical clarity and operational simplicity. Recent studies confirm this continued relevance across diverse contexts, including film adaptation (Ananta & Andini., 2024), genre cinema and characterization (Fatmawati et.al., 2024), and literary analysis of popular fiction (Ikhwan et al., 2024). In this study, the framework allows for a focused examination of how cultural values are articulated through narrative progression, demonstrating its enduring utility for understanding how film texts

organize and communicate cultural meaning.

The corpus consists of 21 short films funded by the Yogyakarta Special Region's Cultural Office, selected based on films that have exhibited at the national and international film festivals. Unit of analysis includes narrative structure, namely characters, conflict, and resolution, supported by key scenes and dialogues. Analytical procedure involves three stages, namely: repeated viewing to map narrative structure using the characterization and basic plot progression; systematic coding of character roles, conflict types, and resolutions; and interpretation of recurring patterns. Thematic identification is derived from narrative structures to ensure analytical consistency.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the construction of local values through narrative structure, drawing on Tzvetan Todorov's model (1971). Rather than treating themes as isolated elements, the analysis examines values that emerge through narrative progression across 21 short films. It focuses on the identification of protagonists, the mapping of conflict, and the tracing of resolution as key elements through which cultural meanings are organized. The logic follow the table 1 summarizes the corpus, including each film's protagonist, conflict, resolution, and key thematic patterns.

Table 1

Thematic narrative analysis of films

No	Title	Protagonist	Synopsis	Conflict	Solution	Local Values
1	Lamun Sumelang Director: Lody Oja Prastama Genre: Fiction Year: 2019	Farm worker	Ningsih, Agus's daughter, was seriously ill. According to a shaman, Agus had to kill seven people in order to cure her. He decided to kill people who were about to commit suicide, hoping to lessen the sin. However, by the time he reached the final victim—his own wife—their daughter had already died.	Agus chooses people attempting suicide to lessen the guilt, but the burden grows heavier with each act.	Despite completing the killings—ending with his own wife—his daughter still dies.	<i>Nrima</i> <i>Eling</i> <i>Waspada</i> <i>Alus</i> <i>Tanggap</i> <i>Tepa Selira</i> <i>Ngalah</i>
2	Cipto Rupo Director: Catur Panggih Raharja Genre: Documentary Year: 2019	A painter and crafter	A film about an old man, Tjipto Setiyono, who keep painting despite of his aging	Tjipto faces the quiet struggle of aging in isolation, with limited income and no family support, while trying to preserve his dignity and creative spirit.	Through persistence and dedication to his craft, Tjipto finds meaning and resilience, showing that creative labor can be a form of survival and self-worth.	<i>Nrima</i> <i>Eling</i> <i>Waspada</i> <i>Tanggap</i>

No	Title	Protagonist	Synopsis	Conflict	Solution	Local Values
3	Kembalilah Dengan Tenang Director: M. Reza Fahriyansyah Genre: Fiction Year: 2019	A poor father	A father, Santoso, struggles to find a burial place for his son's body due to financial problems	The burial system is not accessible for the poor	The film highlights the dignity of grief and critiques a system that denies compassion to the poor.	<i>Nrima Eling Waspada Sadhar Ngalah</i>
4	Di Bawah Langit Yang Sama Director: Adih Saputro Genre: Documentary Year: 2018	Fisherman family	The story of a fisherman, Misto who have to change professions to become sand miners in the river whenever the weather is not favourable	Misto struggles with economic instability, having to switch between dangerous and exhausting jobs just to survive.	Despite the hardship, Misto's resilience and adaptability allow him to continue providing for himself, reflecting the harsh realities faced by many in precarious livelihoods.	<i>Nrima Eling Waspada Sadhar Tanggap</i>
7	Incang Inceng Director: Kelik Sri Nugroho Genre: Fiction Year: 2017)	Javanese, Chinese, Papua boys	Surip and Dhayat want to register for the Pager Mulyo Village soccer competition, but they don't have a soccer team yet. So, they try to recruit team members while completing the requirements for championship participants. This experience also introduces them to new friends and experiences.	The Javanese boys should establish a soccer team	They recruit some boys apart of their ethnicity to build a solid team	<i>Waspada Tanggap Tepa Selira Gotong royong</i>
8.	Dluwang Director: Agni Tirta Genre: Documentary Year: 2017	Archive scavenger	Toni Lubis, a former criminal, has turned his life around by working as an archive seller in a second-hand market. The job gives him a renewed sense of purpose, as he finds value in helping others discover new knowledge.	The protagonist seeks to escape crime in pursuit of a better life.	The protagonist chooses meaningful work that helps others, despite earning less than in his previous job.	<i>Sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe, Migunani Tumpraping Liyan, Urip Tentrem Eling Waspada Sadhar Tepa Selira</i>
9.	Pentas Terakhir Director: Triyanto Hapsoro Genre: Fiction Year: 2017	Kethoprak performers	Parjan, a kethoprak performer, and his son Wantun, who are imprisoned after their theater group is accused of being linked to Lekra. To protect his son, Parjan pretends their arrest is just part of a performance tour.	Parjan struggles to keep his son's innocence intact while facing the harsh reality of imprisonment and impending exile.	Before being exiled, Parjan is granted permission to stage a simple prison performance, offering his daughter one final moment of joy.	<i>Ethok-ethok Rembugan Alus Nrima Ethok2</i>

No	Title	Protagonist	Synopsis	Conflict	Solution	Local Values
10	The Unseen Words Director: Wahyu Utami Wati Genre: Documentary Year: 2017	The blind kethoprak performers	Distra Budaya, a kethoprak theater group made up of visually impaired performers, as they prepare for their next performance. Despite small audiences, their passion for the art form remains strong.	The group struggles with limited public attention and seeks a way to reach a wider audience beyond traditional stage performances.	They decide to record and upload their kethoprak show on YouTube, hoping to entertain and connect with sighted audiences and the broader public	<i>Sepi ing pamrih, rame ing gawe, memayu hayuning bawana, rila, sabar Nrima Eling Sadhar Alus Tepa Slira Gotong royong</i>
11.	Happy Family Director: Eden Junjung Genre: Fiction Year: 2016	A farmer	A father, Ahmad, is looking for his daughter, Kusuma, who hasn't been home in four years.	Kusuma hide his job as prostitute to his father.	Ahmad failed to find Kusuma since she gave him a wrong address.	<i>Becik ketitik ala ketara Eling Sadhar Tanggap Tepa Selira</i>
12	Kleang Kabur Kanginan Director: Riyanto Tan Ageraha Genre: Fiction Year: 2016	Parents live in the mountains	An elderly couple living in a remote mountain village longs to hear from their only son, whom they worked hard to send to school and who now has a good job in the city. As his calls become increasingly rare, waiting by the phone becomes their daily routine.	They struggle with the emotional distance growing between them and their son, despite their longing for even a simple conversation.	Every day the parents take hopeful steps to wait their son phone call	<i>Kleang Kabur Kanginan Nrima Eling Waspada</i>
13.	Ruah Director: Makbul Mubarak Genre: Fiction Year: 2016	A Hajj	Halim Hardiyanto's story is a community leader who is diligent in worship and giving alms whose want to practice polygamy.	Polygamy is sensitive issue among Indonesia Islam society, therefore Halim decision find some challenges some muslimah in his neighbourhood.	A supernatural force intervenes to punish Halim, a man who justifies his lust for many women in the name of religion.	<i>Garwa pecahing dhadha, wutahing ludira Nrima Tepa Selira</i>
14	Amarta Director: Bambang "Ipoenk" KM Genre: Fiction Year: 2015	Water Girl	A girl tries to help people who are having difficulty getting water	The Water Girl should release the Amarta Goddess to fight the cruel ruler who controls the water.	With the help of Water Girl and citizen, the Amarta Goddess is able to defeat the mean ruler.	<i>Tapa Sabar Waspada Tanggap Tepa Selira Gotong royong</i>

No	Title	Protagonist	Synopsis	Conflict	Solution	Local Values
15.	Bawang Kembar Director: Gangsar Waskito Genre: Animation Year: 2016	Young girls	Rara and Puput adventure in the middle of the forest facing Nini Buto Ijo.	Rara break Nini Buto Ijo's statue that triggers her angry	Rara and Puput reassemble the statue and ask for sorry	<i>rereh, ririh lan ngati-ati. Ojo dumeh Isin Eling Waspada Sadar Tanggap</i>
16	Di Kaliurang Director: Fr. Magastowo Genre: Documentary Year: 2015	Villa guards, Japanese cave guards, warung sellers	The story of the Kaliurang area which was once a favorite tourist attraction and its current neglected condition	The neglected area leave some environmental impacts	The resistance residents are trying to maintain the area	<i>Nrima Sabar Eling Tepa Selira</i>
17.	Ilalang, Ingin Hilang Waktu Siang Director: Loeloe Hendra Genre: Fiction Year: 2015	A poor boy	Ilalang is a 9 year-old boy who lives with his grandmother. He starts his adventure by searching ghost every time before going to bed. Ilalang obtains many experiences from his odd meetings. His interaction with darkness, spirits, myths and legends becomes his enjoyment.	Caught between imagination and reality, Ilalang grapples with fear and curiosity as he navigates loneliness and the absence of his parents.	Through strange and symbolic encounters, Ilalang learns to cope with loss by creating his own world—one where darkness becomes a space of wonder, play, and quiet understanding.	<i>Sabar Pesugihan Tamba ati Sadhar Eling Nrima Alus</i>
18	Kitorang Basudara Director: Ninndi Raras Genre: Fiction Year: 2015	Papua students	Two brothers from Papua, Roni and Berto, navigate the challenges of settling into a new life in Yogyakarta. As Roni helps Berto find a boarding house, they confront discrimination, unfamiliar routines, and the realities of urban survival.	Berto struggles to adjust find student accommodation due to subtle ethnicity stereotyping	Berto finds an accommodation because of an open minded old man	<i>Budi luhur Tepa salira Waspada Eling Sadhar Alus</i>
19	Natalan Director: Sidharta Genre: Fiction Year: 2015	Old lady	After four years away from Yogyakarta, Resnu promises to return home to celebrate Christmas Eve Mass with his mother. As he travels from Jakarta with his wife, memories and longing for his mother fill his thoughts.	Resnu is overwhelmed by guilt and emotional distance from his mother after years of absence; however, he must also negotiate with his wife, Dinda, to decide whether they will spend Christmas at his mother's or at Dinda's family home.	Resnu and Dinda decide to attend chrismast eve at Dinda's	<i>Nrima Rila Sungkan Eling Sadhar Ngalah Ethok-etok</i>

No	Title	Protagonist	Synopsis	Conflict	Solution	Local Values
20	Pulang Tanpa Alamat Director: Riyanto Tan Ageraha Genre: Fiction Year: 2015)	Petty bandit	Bondet's journey that tried to bury the bandit boss Remo	People refused to let Remo's body be buried in their village.	Bondet throw Remo's body at the river	Ngajeni Nrima Eling Sadhar Tepa selira
21	Wasis Director: Ima Puspita Sari Genre: Documentary Year: 2015	Old Man	The story of an old education figure, Wasis, who is still actively supporting the socialization of the government's non-formal education program	The young generation seems reluctant to follow the old government program while the others are trying to respect Wasis but still reject the his idea	Wasis persist to promote the program despite of any rejections	Nyimpang lan nyingkur Nrima Eling Sadhar Waspada alus tanggap

Source: primary data

Most short films analyzed depict protagonists categorized as *wong cilik* – ordinary Yogyakarta people from the lower-middle class, including laborers, farmers, market vendors, and small traders. These figures are not portrayed as heroic in the conventional sense but as individuals negotiating everyday emotional and social challenges. This aligns with Javanese sociocultural values in which *wong cilik* function as the silent majority, loyal to social harmony and the cosmic order of power (Suseno, 1984).

The constant presentation of *wong cilik* in Yogyakarta short films brings the typical situation of the emergence of conflict. They are depicted as simple figures who simply survive and adapt to social demands. Bordwell (1985) argues that most of film present the main characters as causal agents of story development since they pursue their desire and goals desperately. However, the *wong cilik* problems typically revolve around fulfil familial obligations, payback emotional debts, and restore of social misrecognition. These conflicts emerge within relational contexts, where tension is

shaped by interpersonal expectations and social norms rather than individual ambition or ideological struggle.

Interestingly, several films such as *Pulang Tanpa Alamat*, *Wasis*, *Kembalilah Dengan Tenang*, *Ruah*, and *Amarta* engage with structural issues like outdated education systems and urban marginalization. However, each narrative remains centered on the protagonist's personal conflict and decision-making. Rather than developing these issues into systemic critique, the films sustain a focus on individual action and introspection.

Apart of structural or interpersonal conflicts, responses of the protagonists are consistently through non-confrontative strategies. Rather than pursuing direct opposition, protagonists navigate tension through internal realignment, emotional restraint, and adaptive negotiation within their capacity. Their decision-making processes are shaped by Javanese values such as *nrima* (acceptance), *ngalah* (giving in), *pangerten* (sensitivity), and *eling* (mindfulness) (Geertz, 1976).

Bawang Kembar is one of the short films that emphasizes *nrima*. This is a

culturally embedded value of acceptance and resilience in the face of hardship. Rather than pursuing transformative rebellion, Javanese characters seek internal peace and measured compromise (Murtisari, 2013). This orientation toward inner balance where the child protagonists strive to repair their broken toy not out of fear of punishment, but from a desire to take personal responsibility—an act that echoes the moral emphasis on integrity and redemption (Sin-Wai & Kwok, 2002).

In certain situations, practicing *nrima* is difficult. Therefore, the *ethok-ethok* strategy is implemented. This is the act of pretending to accept the situation for the sake of communal harmony. While this may seem inauthentic from a Western ethical standpoint, in Javanese moral logic, such tactics are seen as practical forms of diplomacy. *Pentas Terakhir* and *Bawang Kembar* both reflect this value. In these short films, characters navigate expectations and conflicts through performance, metaphor, or indirect expression. The *ethok-ethok* actions are carried out to accept difficult situations and make them easier to resolve the conflict (Suseno, 1984).

Among the most distinctive narrative patterns in these short films is the prevalence of non-confrontative strategies as conflict resolution. The value of *ngalah*—to give in—emerges not as a sign of weakness but as a conscious decision to prioritize social equilibrium over ego assertion. In *Tilik*, for example, Yu Ning chooses silence and measured gestures instead of direct argumentation to contest misinformation. This approach resonates deeply with the Javanese philosophy of subtlety (*alus*) in managing social tensions (Geertz, 1976).

In *Cipto Rupo*, for instance, the protagonist's decision to take moral responsibility over his past mistake leads to

a quiet act of service to his community. The emotional undertone is not heroic sacrifice, but restoration of balance. This reflects the traditional Javanese orientation toward *pangerten*—sensitivity toward others' positions and emotional states (Murtisari, 2013). *Pangerten* allows individuals to be attuned to the feelings and perspectives of others.

Protagonists such as the elderly woman in *Natalan* and the child in *Incang Inceng* assess situations through careful observation and adaptive response. This orientation reflects the Javanese value of *eling* (mindfulness), which emphasizes calmness, reflection, and measured action. The protagonist response toward conflict shapes the solution that focuses on understanding and acceptance rather than assertion of power. Murtisari (2013) explains that *eling* is an active attitude of accepting a situation by understanding other people's points of view.

While individual emotional agency anchors each narrative, many of the short films simultaneously position their characters within tightly-knit social environments where the principles of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) are implicitly or explicitly enacted. The Javanese concept of *gotong royong* describes a form of voluntary, reciprocal assistance operating outside immediate material compensation (Bowen, 1986), underscoring values of equality, cooperation, and collective responsibility.

In *Incang Inceng* (2017), Surip, Dhayat, and children from various backgrounds collaborate. Their shared effort shows the power of togetherness in uniting a community. This unity is achieved even through a simple activity, such as forming a football team. A similar collective spirit is portrayed in *Amarta* (2015), where Water Girl and local villagers join forces to resist the tyranny of the water

ruler. The short film is highlighting that shared challenges require collective solutions. In *The Unseen Words* (2017), the blind *kethoprak* theater community supports each other in producing performances. They are combining their unique strengths to reach new audiences.

Interestingly, films such as *The Unseen Words* and *Amarta* offer community as both the source of pressure and the space for resolution. Characters are compelled to read social signs, interpret unspoken cues, and act in accordance with what is proper for communal well-being. In Javanese ethical reasoning, one's actions are always situated in relation to *masyarakat* (community), and thus morality is relational, not abstract or individualistic (Jong, 1976).

The protagonists' solutions seem passive but are deliberate actions that prioritize social equilibrium over individual assertion. They achieve restoration through relational adjustment rather than confrontation. This opposes classical Hollywood's "character-centered causality" (Bordwell, 1985) in which psychological motivation drives goal-oriented resolution. The Yogyakarta short films therefore offer an alternative to narrative conventions that favor individual transformation and conflict-driven closure. Their chosen solutions instead resemble those of art cinema. Bordwell (2012) further shows that art cinema narratives tend to decenter individual transformation in favor of broader relational patterns. The Yogyakarta short films follow the art cinema narrative pattern instead of popular films.

The Yogyakarta short films solution reflects Geertz's (1976) Javanese "deliberate indirectness," where communication is valued for preserving *rukun* (harmony) rather than individual persistence to communicate

their opinion. Some of local values in the short films such as *nrima* (acceptance), *ngalah* (giving in), *pangerten* (sensitivity), and *eling* (mindfulness) in order to achieve harmony (*hamemayu hayuning bawana*). The protagonist's purpose is restoring the life balance in society instead of achieving their personal desire.

The most encompassing framework expressed across the corpus is the Javanese ethical philosophy of *hamemayu hayuning bawana*. This term refers to the imperative to beautify and harmonize the world. In the Javanese cosmology, this phrase connotes an individual's responsibility to contribute to social order, environmental care, and cultural sustainability (Santosa, 2021). The daily practices of *hamemayu hayuning bawana* through the texture of everyday action such as calm, care, resilience and subtlety. As Suseno (1984) underscores, this ethical framework combines humility, responsibility, and beauty in a manner that is simultaneously enjoins individuals to protect the cosmic and social balance by acting wisely within their role. In the context of contemporary filmmaking, this principle becomes both a thematic concern and a formal aesthetic, guiding how stories are told and what kind of protagonists are elevated.

Beyond the thematic elements and cultural values embedded in the storylines, the short films analyzed in this study employ distinctive narrative and visual styles that align closely with their values orientation. These aesthetic strategies are not merely technical choices, but are themselves carriers of cultural meaning, reflecting a *Javanese sensibility* in characterisation, conflict and resolution.

The use of non-professional actors is also prevalent in many of the films. This choice serves to reinforce the quality of the protagonists and to emphasize the ordinariness of the moral dilemmas they

face. The performances are understated, avoiding melodramatic gestures or excessive dialogue. This aligns with broader discussions on non-professional acting, where authenticity is constructed through the appearance of unmediated presence rather than theatrical performance (O'Rawe, 2025). Geertz (1976) describes Javanese communicative ethos most of time is subtle, indirect, and relational rather than assertive or emotional. This ethos is mirrored in the films' visual storytelling.

One consistent feature across the corpus is the use of slow pacing and long takes, often relying on natural lighting and real locations. This stylistic approach contributes to a sense of authenticity and groundedness, situating the narratives within the lived experience of *wong cilik*. As discussed in studies on slow cinema, such as Matthew Flanagan (2012) and Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge (2016), extended duration and observational framing encourage a contemplative mode of viewing and shift attention from action to everyday temporality. The mise-en-scène further reinforces this approach, depicting modest domestic and rural environments with minimal stylization that aligns with narrative restraint.

The short films frequently use of silence, ambient sound, and minimal dialogue functions as a narrative device that supports the films' non-confrontational structure. Rather than advancing conflict through explicit verbal exchange, scenes are organized around natural soundscape such as footsteps, wind, and environmental noise. The situation shifts the audience attention from dialogue into observe subtle cues such as gesture, pause, and spatial interaction. Background soundscapes shape how cinematic space and emotion are

perceived, while silence operates as an affective and immersive element rather than mere absence (Freitag et al., 2025). In this context, reinforcing a mode of storytelling in which tension is managed through restraint, reflection, and indirect response rather than confrontation.

At the level of narrative structure, many of the films employ open-ended or circular resolutions that resist definitive closure. Rather than resolving conflict through decisive action, endings often signal acceptance, reflection, or a return to social equilibrium. Such endings challenge dominant narrative conventions that privilege closure as the resolution of conflict, instead aligning with alternative narrative logics in which openness carries interpretive and ideological significance (MacDowell, 2012). More importantly, resolution is achieved through non-confrontational strategies that avoid direct opposition or decisive victory, reflecting what Remington (2011) describes as narrative forms that move beyond conflict-based resolution toward relational adjustment and mutual accommodation.

Taken together, the findings confirm that Yogyakarta short films consistently employ non-confrontational narrative strategies, a pattern also observed in previous studies (Utami & Arifianto, 2025; Nurkamilah & Rahman, 2025). This tendency forms a distinctive local film grammar in which narrative meaning is constructed through subtlety, reflection, and indirect resolution rather than explicit confrontation. Across diverse genres, these films converge in organizing conflict and resolution through relational and situational responses, producing a coherent cultural worldview that is both locally grounded and responsive to contemporary realities. In this sense, cultural values are not only articulated thematically but embedded within

narrative structure and form, shaping how stories are told and how meaning is experienced.

CONCLUSION

This study examines Yogyakarta short films construction of local cultural values through narrative structure. The local values that represent in the short films including *nrima* (acceptance), *ngalah* (yielding), *pangerten* (sensitivity), and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). All of them collectively reflect the principle of *hamemayu hayuning bawana*, (the maintenance of social harmony).

The findings reveals that these values are not presented as abstract themes but are embedded in narrative organization. The films consistently position *wong cilik* as protagonists whose conflicts emerge from everyday life, particularly from their relationships within family and community contexts. Rather than being driven by individual ambition or confrontation. While resolution is achieved through the protagonists'

responses, which emphasize restraint, adaptation, and relational adjustment.

This narrative pattern produces a non-confrontational narrative strategy in which conflict is not resolved through decisive action but through acceptance, negotiation, and the rebalancing of social relations. Endings are frequently open-ended, signaling reflection or a return to equilibrium rather than closure. These narrative tendencies are reinforced by formal elements such as minimal dialogue, the use of silence and ambient sound, non-professional actors, and slow pacing, all of which shift emphasis from dramatic confrontation to observation and interpretation.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Yogyakarta short films organize non-confrontational narrative through a coherent structure of protagonists, relational conflicts, and open-ending resolutions work together to express local cultural values. In this way, cultural meaning is embedded in film narrative supported by aesthetic choice.

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