

Representation of Balinese Traditional Culture in the Film *A Perfect Fit* (Semiotics of Roland Barthes)

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Abstract

This research aims to identify, describe, and understand the representation of Balinese culture and customs in the film *A Perfect Fit* (2021), directed by Hadrah Daeng Ratu, through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This descriptive-analytical qualitative study examines audio-visual signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth to **reveal** implicit meanings and ideologies represented by the characters in negotiating tradition and modernity. Primary data were obtained from observations of Balinese cultural scene patterns, while secondary data came from relevant academic literature. The results show that at the denotative level, Balinese culture is presented through visual symbols such as gebogan, lontar paweton, Payas Agung attire, the Mebuug-buugan tradition, and gamelan music. At the connotative level, these elements mark values of sacredness, harmony, self-purification, and cultural identity. At the myth level, the film reproduces the idea that Balinese culture and spirituality are adaptive, harmonious, and remain prioritized amid modern urban living. The study concludes that transnational film media functions as a space for meaning construction that affirms the sustainability of Balinese tradition in the global digital era.

Keywords

Cultural Representation, Balinese Customs, *A Perfect Fit*, Roland Barthes Semiotics, Transnational Cinema



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INTRODUCTION

Film is one of the most influential forms of audiovisual communication and plays an important role in representing, communicating, and introducing cultural values to society. The development of digital technology and globalization has expanded the function of film beyond entertainment, positioning it as a medium through which cultural values, ideologies, and social identities are constructed and communicated. Through visual elements, dialogue, characters, narratives, costumes, rituals, and cultural symbols, films can construct particular meanings about social groups and cultures. Consequently, cultural representation in film has become an increasingly important issue in contemporary communication and media studies

(Al-Maliki, 2025a).

The emergence of digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ has further expanded the circulation of films beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. Films that were previously consumed primarily within national contexts can now reach audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds worldwide. This development corresponds with the emergence of transnational cinema, referring to cinematic works that transcend national boundaries in terms of production, distribution, and audience reception (Higbee & Lim, 2010). Transnational cinema has therefore transformed not only the film industry but also the ways in which cultural narratives are produced, represented, distributed, and interpreted in the digital era (Al-Maliki, 2025a; Balan & Jiang, 2025).

Digital platforms are also increasingly involved in determining how local cultures are selected, packaged, and presented to global audiences. The representation of non-Western cultures in globally distributed films consequently raises questions about how local cultural practices are constructed and understood through popular media. Cultural representation cannot always be regarded as neutral because the selection and presentation of cultural signs may contain particular values, perspectives, and ideological meanings. Therefore, examining local cultural representation in transnational films is important for understanding how cultural identities are negotiated within the interaction between local traditions and global media industries. Balinese culture provides an important context for examining this issue because it contains diverse cultural practices, traditions, rituals, religious activities, social relationships, traditional clothing, offerings, and other symbolic practices. These cultural elements are closely associated with the philosophical concept of *Tri Hita Karana*, which emphasizes harmony between humans and God (*Parahyangan*), humans and other humans (*Pawongan*), and humans and nature (*Palemahan*). When these cultural elements are represented through film, they may function not merely as visual decorations or narrative settings but also as signs that construct particular meanings about Balinese identity, tradition, spirituality, and social life.

One film that provides an interesting representation of Balinese culture is *A Perfect Fit*, released by Netflix in 2021. The film follows Saski, a fashion blogger living in Jakarta, who becomes involved in a relationship with Deni, a man from Bali with a strong traditional cultural background. Throughout the narrative, the relationship between the two characters is connected with various Balinese cultural rituals and practices before their marriage. The film consequently presents an encounter between modern urban lifestyles and local traditions. This encounter involves processes of interaction, negotiation, adaptation, and acceptance between different cultural orientations. The representation of Balinese culture in *A Perfect Fit* is therefore important to examine because cultural practices are integrated into the characters' relationships and the development of the narrative. Traditional clothing, rituals, offerings, social practices, and other cultural symbols may communicate meanings beyond their literal visual forms. These representations can construct particular understandings of Balinese culture and may simultaneously reproduce or challenge certain

assumptions about tradition, modernity, gender relations, family, and cultural identity.

Such representations can be examined through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes conceptualizes meaning through three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal or direct meaning of a sign, whereas connotation involves meanings associated with cultural values, emotions, and social experiences. Myth represents a second-order system of signification through which particular cultural and ideological meanings become naturalized and accepted as common sense (Kusuma & Nurhayati, 2017). Applying Barthes' framework therefore makes it possible to examine not only what cultural signs appear in the film but also how those signs generate deeper cultural and ideological meanings.

Previous studies have demonstrated the relevance of semiotic analysis for examining meaning and representation in audiovisual media. Kartini (2023), in a semiotic analysis of *Broken Kite*, applied Roland Barthes' three-level model to identify denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings in a Netflix audiovisual production. The study demonstrates the usefulness of Barthes' framework for uncovering meanings embedded in audiovisual signs. Nur et al. (2021), through their study of *NKCTHI*, also applied Barthesian semiotics to analyze signs and meanings in an Indonesian film. Their findings demonstrate that semiotic analysis can reveal social meanings constructed through characters, narratives, and visual representations.

Research by Gayatri Dewi et al. (2025) specifically examined cultural representation in the film *Bali Komang*. The study analyzed cultural symbols such as *canang sari* and their relationship with the construction of Bali as the "Island of the Gods." This research demonstrates that cultural symbols represented in film can generate meanings extending beyond their physical forms and can contribute to the construction of cultural identity and imagery. Meanwhile, Al-Maliki (2025a) examined cultural representation in audiovisual media within the context of digital development and emphasized the increasing importance of digital platforms in constructing and circulating cultural meanings. Balan and Jiang (2025) similarly highlighted the role of digital platforms such as Netflix in distributing and presenting local cultural narratives to global audiences. Their study indicates that streaming platforms are not merely distribution channels but also important spaces in which cultural narratives are selected and presented to international audiences. Furthermore, Higbee and Lim (2010) demonstrated that the development of transnational cinema has transformed the production, distribution, and reception of films across national boundaries, providing an important conceptual foundation for understanding the relationship between local cultures and global cinematic circulation.

Although previous studies have addressed Barthesian semiotics, cultural representation, Balinese cultural symbols, and transnational cinema, several gaps remain. Existing studies tend to examine semiotic meanings, cultural representation, or transnational media separately. Research on Balinese culture has also tended to focus on particular cultural symbols or representations without simultaneously examining the ideological meanings

constructed through characters and narrative relationships. In addition, limited attention has been given to the representation of Balinese culture in *A Perfect Fit* as a Netflix-distributed transnational film that explicitly brings together Balinese tradition and modern urban life.

The novelty of this study lies in integrating Roland Barthes' three levels of signification denotation, connotation, and myth with an analysis of ideology to examine the representation of Balinese culture in *A Perfect Fit*. Rather than merely identifying the cultural symbols presented in the film, this study investigates how these symbols construct cultural meanings and how such meanings are connected to ideological representations expressed through the characters and narrative. The study also places the representation of Balinese culture within the context of transnational cinema, particularly the interaction between local tradition, modernity, and global media circulation. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local Indonesian culture is represented and potentially naturalized through a globally accessible streaming platform. Based on this background, this study aims to describe the forms of Balinese culture and customs represented in *A Perfect Fit* and to analyze the ideologies represented through the characters and narrative of the film. Specifically, the study applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to identify denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings contained in cultural signs and examines how these meanings contribute to the ideological construction of Balinese culture, tradition, modernity, and social identity in the film.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical research design. The object of the study was the representation of Balinese culture and the ideologies embodied by the characters in the film *A Perfect Fit* (Netflix, 2021). The primary data were obtained from selected scenes and sequences in the film, while secondary data consisted of books, scholarly journal articles, and other relevant academic literature supporting the analysis. Data were collected through repeated viewing of the film, followed by the identification and selection of approximately 15–25 key scenes relevant to the research objectives. The selected dialogues were transcribed and presented in narrative form, while the visual elements of each scene were documented and described in detail. These elements included the setting, properties, gestures, visual composition, camera angles, and accompanying music. The selection of scenes was based on their relevance to the representation of Balinese cultural practices, customs, values, and ideological meanings expressed through the characters and narrative.

The data analysis process integrated sign coding, Barthes' semiotic analysis, and ideological analysis. Each selected scene was first coded according to the relevant cultural signs. The signs were subsequently analyzed at three levels of meaning proposed by Roland Barthes: denotation, connotation, and myth. The analysis was then extended to examine the ideological meanings represented through the characters, interactions, dialogue, actions, and narrative structures. Data validity was ensured through prolonged and persistent observation, theoretical triangulation, and peer debriefing to strengthen the credibility and

consistency of the interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The film *A Perfect Fit*, directed by Hadrah Daeng Ratu with a screenplay written by Garin Nugroho, presents various representations of Balinese culture through visual elements, dialogue, character actions, traditional practices, and cultural symbols. The main characters are portrayed by Nadya Arina as Saski, Refal Hady as Rio, and Giorgino Abraham as Deni. Based on repeated observation of the film, five scenes were identified as relevant primary data for analyzing the representation of Balinese culture through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. The following table presents the raw findings obtained from the selected scenes. The table focuses on observable elements in the film without providing theoretical interpretation.

Table 2. Raw Data of Balinese Cultural Representation in *A Perfect Fit*

No	Selected Scene	Observable Data	Cultural Elements Identified
1	Gebogan procession on the main road	Balinese residents carry <i>gebogan</i> on their heads while walking in a procession along a main road. Traffic is temporarily regulated and diverted by <i>Pecalang</i> using traffic-control signs.	<i>Gebogan</i> , religious procession, <i>Pecalang</i> , community participation, public-road activity
2	Reading of <i>Lontar Paweton</i>	Pak Mangku wears a white <i>udeng</i> and reads a Balinese <i>lontar</i> to determine the <i>paweton</i> of the prospective bride and groom.	<i>Lontar</i> , <i>udeng</i> , Pak Mangku, <i>paweton</i> , customary and spiritual practice
3	<i>Payas Agung</i> traditional attire	The bride and groom wear traditional Balinese <i>Payas Agung</i> , including golden crowns and <i>kain prada</i> .	<i>Payas Agung</i> , golden crown, <i>kain prada</i> , wedding ceremony
4	<i>Mebuug-buugan</i> tradition	Community members covered with dried banana leaves (<i>daluang</i>) participate in mud wrestling involving soil and water.	<i>Mebuug-buugan</i> , <i>daluang</i> , mud, water, communal participation
5	Balinese youth performing gamelan	A group of Balinese young people plays gamelan instruments together in an outdoor setting in Ubud.	Gamelan, Balinese youth, traditional musical instruments, communal performance

Source: Primary data from selected scenes in the film *A Perfect Fit* (2021).

The table shows five scenes containing observable representations of Balinese cultural practices. The cultural elements include religious processions, traditional spiritual practices, wedding attire, communal traditions involving natural elements, and traditional performing arts.

Discussion

The five selected scenes demonstrate that *A Perfect Fit* represents Balinese culture through a combination of material objects, social practices, rituals, clothing, artistic activities,

and community participation. These representations can be interpreted through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which distinguishes meaning into denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the scenes present cultural practices that can be directly observed. At the connotative level, these practices generate meanings associated with spirituality, social relationships, identity, harmony, and tradition. At the level of myth, particular cultural meanings are constructed as natural, legitimate, and continuously relevant within contemporary life.

The first scene depicts a procession in which residents carry *gebogan* along a main road while *Pecalang* regulate traffic. At the denotative level, the scene simply shows residents carrying *gebogan* and traffic being temporarily redirected. At the connotative level, the coexistence of a religious procession and modern transportation infrastructure represents an interaction between traditional cultural practices and contemporary urban life. The presence of *Pecalang* indicates that traditional communal structures can operate alongside modern systems of public order. At the level of myth, the scene constructs the idea that Balinese religious traditions remain socially legitimate and deserve public accommodation even within modern mobility systems.

This finding is consistent with the argument of Higbee and Lim (2010) that transnational cinema can provide a space in which local cultural identities are displayed within broader social and cultural contexts. The finding also supports Al-Maliki's (2025a) argument that audiovisual media can function as a medium for presenting local cultural values to audiences beyond their original geographical context. However, the scene can also be read critically because the representation of tradition as naturally prioritized over transportation efficiency may simplify the complex negotiation between religious obligations, public order, and modern urban life. Thus, the scene does not merely document Balinese tradition but constructs a particular ideological relationship between tradition and modernity.

The second scene presents Pak Mangku reading a *lontar* to determine the *paweton* of the prospective bride and groom. At the denotative level, the scene displays a traditional figure wearing a white *udeng* and reading a Balinese *lontar*. The connotative meaning relates to spirituality, customary authority, and the role of traditional knowledge in determining an appropriate time for marriage. The practice positions traditional knowledge as a source of guidance for important decisions in personal and family life. At the mythological level, the scene constructs Balinese spirituality as an enduring form of local wisdom that remains meaningful in contemporary life. This finding strengthens the cultural representation identified by Gayatri Dewi et al. (2025), particularly their observation that Balinese cultural symbols represented in film can carry meanings beyond their physical forms. However, the present finding extends the previous study by demonstrating that cultural representation is not limited to material symbols such as *canang sari*. Cultural knowledge and traditional authority can also function as semiotic signs through which Balinese identity is constructed. The scene therefore expands the understanding of cultural representation from visible

cultural artifacts toward cultural practices and systems of knowledge.

The third scene depicts the characters wearing *Payas Agung*, complete with golden crowns and *kain prada*. Denotatively, the scene shows traditional Balinese wedding attire. Connotatively, the clothing represents honor, sacredness, beauty, and the significance of marriage as an important rite of passage. The elaborate visual appearance of the attire reinforces the ceremonial character of the marriage. At the level of myth, *Payas Agung* is represented as an enduring expression of Balinese cultural identity whose sacred and aesthetic value remains relevant despite the influence of modern and Western fashion. This finding is related to the broader argument of Stuart Hall concerning representation as a process through which cultural meaning is constructed rather than merely reflected. The clothing does not simply indicate that the characters are attending a Balinese wedding; it actively constructs the meaning of the wedding as culturally significant and spiritually grounded. The finding also complements the research of Gayatri Dewi et al. (2025), which demonstrates how cultural symbols can contribute to the construction of Balinese cultural identity. Nevertheless, the present analysis suggests that traditional attire may also participate in an idealized representation of Balinese culture by emphasizing its beauty, sacredness, and timelessness while providing limited space for cultural tensions or internal diversity.

The fourth scene depicts the *Mebuug-buugan* tradition, in which community members cover themselves with dried banana leaves and participate in mud-related activities involving soil and water. At the denotative level, the scene presents people engaging collectively with mud, soil, water, and *daluang*. At the connotative level, the practice can be associated with purification, communal participation, and the relationship between humans and nature. At the level of myth, the scene constructs an image of Balinese society as maintaining a harmonious relationship between human beings, their community, and the natural environment. This interpretation corresponds with the philosophical concept of *Tri Hita Karana*, particularly *Palemahan*, which concerns the relationship between humans and nature, and *Pawongan*, which concerns relationships among human beings. The representation therefore illustrates how cultural practices can embody philosophical values without necessarily presenting those values explicitly through dialogue. In relation to previous research, this finding complements Gayatri Dewi et al. (2025) by demonstrating that Balinese cultural representation can communicate broader philosophical values through communal practices rather than through isolated cultural objects. The finding also reinforces the view that film can transform local cultural practices into narratives that can be interpreted by audiences outside the cultural community.

The fifth scene presents Balinese young people performing gamelan together in an outdoor setting in Ubud. At the denotative level, the scene shows young people playing traditional musical instruments collectively. At the connotative level, the performance signifies togetherness, cultural participation, and the transmission of tradition across generations. At the mythological level, the scene constructs traditional Balinese art as a living

cultural practice that continues to exist through younger generations rather than as a cultural artifact preserved only as part of the past. This finding supports the argument of Balan and Jiang (2025) that digital platforms can contribute to the circulation of local cultural narratives to broader audiences. Through *A Perfect Fit*, traditional Balinese art is presented within a contemporary audiovisual product that can be accessed by audiences beyond Indonesia. The representation consequently contributes to the construction of Balinese culture as dynamic and sustainable. However, the positive representation may also be viewed critically because the film's selective presentation of cultural practices can create a highly coherent and harmonious image of Balinese society while leaving out cultural contradictions, contestations, and changes that may occur in everyday life.

Across the five scenes, the Barthesian analysis indicates that *A Perfect Fit* constructs Balinese culture through three interconnected layers of meaning. At the denotative level, the film displays recognizable cultural objects and practices, including *gebogan*, *lontar*, *Payas Agung*, *Mebuug-buugan*, and gamelan. At the connotative level, these signs communicate values such as spirituality, communal solidarity, respect for tradition, harmony, cultural identity, and intergenerational continuity. At the level of myth, these meanings are naturalized into broader ideas that Balinese culture is spiritually grounded, harmonious, aesthetically distinctive, environmentally connected, and resilient in the face of modernity.

The representation also reveals an ideological dimension. The film does not simply present Balinese culture as a collection of traditions but constructs a particular relationship between tradition and modernity. Modern urban life is generally positioned as capable of coexisting with local tradition rather than completely replacing it. This representation can be understood as an affirmation of cultural continuity within a transnational media environment. In this sense, the findings support Al-Maliki (2025a), Balan and Jiang (2025), and Higbee and Lim (2010), who emphasize the importance of digital and transnational media in circulating local cultural narratives to global audiences. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that the representation is selective and potentially idealized. By emphasizing rituals, traditional clothing, communal practices, spirituality, and traditional arts, the film tends to construct Balinese culture through aesthetically attractive and harmonious images. This does not necessarily mean that the representation is inaccurate; rather, it demonstrates that cultural representation involves selection and framing. In Barthesian terms, repeated positive representations can transform particular cultural interpretations into myths that appear natural and self-evident. Therefore, *A Perfect Fit* simultaneously functions as a medium for cultural affirmation and as a site where particular ideological constructions of Balinese identity are produced and circulated.

The findings affirm previous research concerning the capacity of film and digital media to construct cultural meanings through signs. However, this study extends those findings by examining Balinese cultural representation in *A Perfect Fit* through the combined application of Barthesian semiotics and ideological analysis. The analysis demonstrates that the film's cultural signs operate not only as representations of local traditions but also as

mechanisms through which ideas about spirituality, cultural continuity, harmony, tradition, modernity, and Balinese identity are constructed and naturalized.

CONCLUSION

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, *A Perfect Fit* represents Balinese culture and customs through three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. The findings indicate that the film constructs an ideology of cultural negotiation in which modernity does not necessarily eliminate local traditions but can coexist with them through processes of adaptation and accommodation. Balinese cultural practices are represented through religious processions, traditional knowledge, wedding attire, communal rituals, and traditional arts, which collectively construct meanings of spirituality, cultural identity, harmony, and cultural continuity. However, the representation also tends to idealize Balinese culture by emphasizing its aesthetic, spiritual, and harmonious dimensions. Future researchers are encouraged to employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Audience Reception Analysis to examine how such representations are interpreted and negotiated by audiences, particularly global audiences. Filmmakers and streaming platforms are also encouraged to involve local cultural and customary figures more extensively in the production process to ensure that cultural representations remain contextually appropriate, authentic, ethical, and respectful of the complexity of Balinese cultural identity.

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