

## Discovering Indonesian Local Traditions through the Film *Pabrik Gula* (2025)

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### Abstract

Local traditions constitute a vital aspect of culture that must be introduced and comprehended by the general public, particularly the younger generation. As a nation renowned for its vast and diverse local traditions, Indonesia provides a rich context for such exploration. This study, therefore, aims to identify and analyze the local traditions depicted in the Indonesian horror film *Pabrik Gula*, released in 2025. The findings of this study will serve as a valuable resource for readers seeking to deepen their understanding of local traditions as represented in films. The primary data for this analysis were drawn directly from the film itself. The data gathered from the film, which pertains to local traditions, is thoroughly examined and analyzed through the lens of Stuart Hall's theory of representation. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the meanings conveyed by these traditions. The analysis reveals that there are four local traditions prominently influence the film: the *Wayang* performance tradition, the custom of making offerings (*sesajen*), the *Kuda Lumping* dance, and the *Manten Tebu* tradition. They represent human personalities, the interplay between humanity and the natural world, as well as themes of resilience, prosperity, and overall well-being. The local traditions depicted in the films significantly contribute to the evocation of horror, as they are deeply intertwined with themes of mysticism within their cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** local tradition; Indonesian horror film; *Pabrik Gula*; representation

### Introduction

Cultural richness is one of Indonesia's characteristics that can contribute to the development of the entertainment world, especially film. Films, as a popular form of entertainment, aim to captivate and impress audiences by exposing a variety of attractions. One of the methods that filmmakers use to achieve this is by combining cultural elements into their works. Many Indonesian films include a number of regional cultures from Indonesia. Javanese, Batak, Sundanese, and other cultures are often featured in Indonesian movies across various film genres. One aspect of culture that can be found in Indonesian films is tradition. It is undeniable that every region in Indonesia has its own traditions.

Local traditions may manifest as dances, traditional ceremonies, songs, lifestyles, beliefs, local legends, and more. These local traditions are regarded as capable of enhancing a film's value (Suryanto, 2021). The incorporation of diverse local traditions into Indonesian films during a time marked by technological progress appears to be a fascinating trend for Indonesian society. Film audiences from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds can experience traditions from different regions through films. In addition to serving as a form of entertainment for viewers, films have the ability to picture diverse facets of human life, including cultural elements (Ulinuha et al., 2018). Different cultures undoubtedly possess distinct local traditions, with each region showcasing its own unique practices. This diversity presents an opportunity for individuals to expand their understanding and knowledge of regional wisdom.

Indonesian cinema frequently portrays a wide array of local traditions from different areas, often employing them as themes, titles, or central plot elements. Many of these local

traditions are closely linked to myths, superstitions, or supernatural beliefs held by specific communities (Kurniawan & Santabudi, 2023). Consequently, it's not surprising that horror films, particularly those with ghost themes, frequently incorporate aspects of local traditions through myths or mystical rituals. Indonesian horror films, in particular, often highlight local customs as key elements of their narratives. Discussing the rituals that are integral to local traditions, some rituals may be widely recognized, others remain obscure to many. For instance, numerous customs from Java might not be familiar to those from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, or Irian Jaya. Conversely, traditions from regions outside Java may also be unknown to Javanese audiences.

By featuring specific local customs in horror films, filmmakers can capture viewers' interest and shine a light on these lesser-known practices. Some studies have explored the aspects of tradition and culture in horror films, as conducted by prior researchers. For instance, a film study conducted by Ulinuha et al. (2018) revealed that the film *Golok Lanang Wanten* features an image of a Banten machete, symbolizing local cultural identity and conveying a deeper moral message. There was also a study on Javanese culture presented in the short film *Tilik*, conducted by Wuwung et al. (2021), reveals that the film effectively reflects key aspects of Javanese culture, emphasizing the significance of values such as kindness, religious devotion, mutual assistance, and polite communication in Javanese tradition.

Additionally, Mineri & Riyanto (2023) which involved gathering responses from viewers of the film *Yowis Ben* also indicated the presence of local cultural elements, such as the use of the Javanese language and the depiction of traditional *pecel* food, which are effective in preserving the regional cultural heritage. Next, Nugraheni's (2023) study highlights the frequent use of Javanese props, costumes, and makeup in these films. Kurniawan & Santabudi (2023) conducted a study exploring local culture in the film *Mangkujiwo*, emphasizing that the cultural elements portrayed in the movie reflect patterns associated with myths, magic, and Javanese *Kejawen* beliefs. After examining several sources as outlined earlier, it is evident that the current study stands apart from previous research in several key aspects, the films selected for analysis, the analytical methods employed, the theoretical framework for interpretation, and the findings. This study utilizes the ghost-themed film *Pabrik Gula*, directed by Awi Suryadi and released on March 31, 2025, as the primary data for analysis. Set in a historic sugar factory from the Dutch colonial period, the film features intriguing elements of local Javanese tradition that are fascinating to discuss.

Considering the details provided earlier, this study aims to uncover the local traditions represented in the film and to explore the importance of these traditions as depicted in the narrative. This research was carried out with the intention of adding to the theoretical frameworks in literary, cultural, and media studies, serving as a supplementary resource for film analysis and also encouraging readers' appreciation of local Indonesian traditions. Since the study explores local traditions, deepening the understanding of the term "tradition" is essential. The concept of local tradition is often intertwined with the term culture, as tradition fundamentally constitutes a component of culture. Defining "tradition" can be challenging due to its wide-ranging implications. As a result, there are numerous interpretations of what tradition encompasses. Nonetheless, there is a core foundation that serves to clarify the essence of tradition. To gain a clearer insight into the concept of tradition, various definitions have been gathered.

Tradition can generally be perceived as a lifestyle comprising the customs and beliefs that are passed down and practiced from one generation to the next within a tribe or society (Adibah, 2015). Similar to the earlier definition, Rangel (2022) noted that traditions are customs handed down from one generation to another, commonly embraced by most individuals within a society or culture. Tradition can be understood as a hereditary practice that covers every aspect of human existence and serves as a means to uphold the human

experience (Kartini & Zed, 2023). The three interpretations of the concept of tradition outlined above indicate that its defining feature lies in its creation by individuals to meet their needs and its transmission from one generation to the next. Thus, tradition can be defined as the collection of activities or practices undertaken to support different parts of human life, which are subsequently handed down to future generations. When examining traditions in relation to their geographical scope, they can be categorized into several types, such as state traditions, local traditions, and family traditions.

Given its extensive territory, Indonesia is rich in local traditions. Each of these local traditions possesses unique traits that set it apart from others. The film *Pabrik Gula* is set in Central Java, a region that serves as the heart of Javanese civilization and culture. It presents some local Javanese traditions that can be explored. *Pabrik Gula* (2025) is a horror film centered around a group of friends who take up a job at a haunted old sugar cane mill constructed during the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia. As they settle in, they are tormented by the spirits that inhabit the place, experiencing a range of horrifying events including mass possessions by malevolent entities, terrifying apparitions, and the tragic deaths of several coworkers. Although this is a horror film centered on ghosts, it includes several distinctive local Javanese traditions that offer a rich area for further exploration. Therefore, this study does not delve into the horror elements of the film; instead, it focuses on the aspects of local tradition depicted in the movie.

### **Theory and Method**

This descriptive qualitative study employs Awi Suryadi's film *Pabrik Gula* (2025) as its primary source of data. The information collected consists of textual explanations regarding the local traditions depicted in various scenes of the film. Given that the focus of this study is to investigate the local traditions, they are thoroughly described and elucidated with the aid of several pertinent references. The data collection process through the film consists of two primary stages: (1) The film is viewed multiple times attentively to identify elements of local tradition. (2) The identified local traditions are documented and organized systematically to streamline the data analysis process. The text, which included various local traditions featured in the film, was subsequently analyzed by offering comprehensive explanations of the definitions, characteristics, meanings, and symbols associated with each tradition. In order to understand the meaning and symbolism of the traditions, this study draws upon Hall's theory of representation, which focuses on the construction of meaning. Regarding the creation of meaning, Hall (1997) theory of representation posits that humans generate meaning through a system of representation that incorporates concepts and signs. Hall's concept emphasizes that an object does not hold its own meaning without humans interpreting and defining that meaning. Thus, through the application of Hall's representation theory, this study intends to uncover the underlying meaning of Javanese local traditions as portrayed in the film.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The analysis of the film *Pabrik Gula* reveals that it features some local Javanese traditions, including *wayang* performances, Tradition of Making Offerings (*Sesajen*), the *kuda lumping* traditional dance, and the tradition of *Manten Tebu* (the sugar cane wedding ritual). These traditions contain meanings that can illuminate broader concepts. By applying the theory of representation to the process of meaning-constructing, the four local traditions can be understood in the following ways:

Table 1. The Construction of Meaning in Local Traditions as Depicted in *Pabrik Gula*  
Table of Representation

No	Local Traditions from the Film	Meaning-Constructing
1	<i>Wayang</i> Performance	Diverse categories of human personalities
2	Tradition of Making Offerings ( <i>Sesajen</i> )	The inseparable relationship between humans and the natural world
3	The <i>Kuda Lumping</i> Traditional Dance	Strength
4	the tradition of <i>Manten Tebu</i> (the sugar cane wedding ritual)	Blessings and prosperity

Each local tradition can undoubtedly be analyzed from multiple viewpoints, allowing the to represent a diverse array of meanings. Beyond their explicit definitions, these traditions can also be understood in a connotative sense by synthesizing various ideas and interpretations related to them. Below is an exploration of these traditions to uncover their significance.

### 1. *Wayang* Performance

*Wayang*, a significant artistic performance in Javanese culture, has become a tradition intricately integrated into the daily lives of the people of Java. *Wayang* performances are typically held as entertainment during cultural festivals, traditional ceremonies, or weddings. This form of puppetry has a rich history and has been handed down through generations within Javanese society, serving as a hallmark of Javanese culture. *Wayang* performance is known as a traditional shadow puppet show conducted by a puppeteer (*dalang*) who uses Javanese dialogue and is accompanied by gamelan music. *Wayang* is crafted from various materials, including skin, wood, and bamboo puppets, and so on. The prevalent type of puppet (*wayang*) in Javanese culture is the shadow puppet, typically made from the skins of buffalos, cows, or goats. These hides are processed into thin leather sheets that can be intricately carved. *Wayang* performances utilize a white cloth screen and a lamp as a light source to cast the shadows of the puppets. Therefore, these performances are typically held at night or in dimly lit settings, allowing the audience to see the puppet shadows more distinctly.

The ritualistic blend of shadow puppetry, the Javanese language, and unique gamelan music has made *wayang* performances increasingly associated with spiritualism and mysticism. This quality lends a mystical atmosphere to the performances, which horror filmmakers often leverage to intensify the sense of horror for their narratives. According to Saptodewo (2013), shadow puppets, commonly found in Central Java, initially served as elements of religious ritual ceremonies. Nugroho (2021) notes that in ancient times, the Javanese paid homage to the gods and ancestral spirits by making offerings in hopes of receiving safety, peace, and success in their endeavors and this practice gave rise to various ritual traditions. Additionally, Nugroho also mentions that *wayang* performances were frequently incorporated into these ceremonies.

*Wayang* features a diverse set of characters, including both male and female roles, protagonists and antagonists, as well as gods and goddesses. Performances often entail stories or legends, such as the Mahabharata, which includes notable characters like *Kresna*, *Arjuna*, *Indra*, *Gatotkaca*, *Srikandi*, *Bima*, *Sadewa*, and more. The Ramayana is another significant story, featuring characters like *Rama*, *Hanoman*, *Bharata*, etc. Additionally, the *wayang* tradition includes popular figures such as *Bagong*, *Gareng*, *Petruk*, *Semar*, and *Togog*, who are especially cherished by the Javanese people. Therefore, these shadow puppets are typically designed to depict human figures that embody a mix of positive and negative characteristics (Rohman et al., 2020). The habits, thought patterns, life experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of people are reflected in the narratives portrayed in *wayang* performances.

These performances are not merely forms of entertainment; they also serve as a mode of communication.

In addition, wayang is also considered an educational tool, as the content imparts valuable messages to the audiences, providing moral lessons, enhancing knowledge, and promoting self-improvement, among other benefits (Maharani et al., 2019). *Wayang*, a quintessential Javanese cultural art form recognized globally, must be preserved and sustained to ensure that its cultural values are handed down to future generations, allowing wayang art to continue representing the identity of the Indonesian nation (Lumenta, 2023).



Figure 1. The Scene of Wayang Performance in the Film *Pabrik Gula*

Overall, the inclusion of the *wayang* performance portrait is intended to evoke a distinct Javanese essence in the film *Pabrik Gula*. Nevertheless, emergence of this scene invites further examination, particularly regarding its significance.

The interpretation of wayang within the film is inextricably linked to its philosophical foundations. As a revered art form within Javanese cultural heritage, *wayang* embodies a range of noble values and moral teachings that are not easily recognized by everyone. *Wayang* performances, steeped in Javanese culture, reflect the philosophy of human existence. With a diverse type of characters, *wayang* can function as a representation of the duality inherent in the human spirit, illustrating both its virtues and vices. The unique characteristics and significance of the wayang depicted above can convey a representation of meanings connected to human existence. *Wayang* performances, frequently linked to traditional ceremonies or religious rituals, exemplify a fundamental aspect of Javanese culture. They can also illustrate the interrelationship between humanity and the natural world, with nature or the universe symbolizing the Creator in this context.

## 2. Tradition of Making Offerings (*Sesajen*)

In ancient times, the Javanese people held a belief in gods and supernatural beings that required respect and offerings. This practice constituted an essential aspect of ancient Javanese culture. Even in contemporary times, the tradition of making offerings remains prevalent in various cultural activities. Offerings are presented in several sacred locations, such as large trees, revered heirlooms, or rooms and houses believed to be inhabited by supernatural entities. The practice of making offerings is commonly seen in various activities, including harvest celebrations, housewarming ceremonies, traditional rituals, as well as events related to births and deaths, and interactions with supernatural powers, and so on. The contents of offerings may differ significantly based on the cultural practices of each region. In Javanese tradition, offerings typically include flowers, fruits, eggs, food, beverages, candles, incense, and more. They are commonly part of traditional ceremonies.

Based on the preceding discussion, it is evident that the tradition of offerings is fundamentally associated with the belief in supernatural forces inherent in nature, which significantly impact human existence. Consequently, this act is regarded as a sacred ritual, imbued with profound meaning and philosophical significance within Javanese culture

(Kholis & Sudrajat, 2022). In Javanese traditional wedding ceremonies, for instance, the act of making offerings is a longstanding custom passed down through generations. Thus, the examination of offerings is intrinsically linked to the underlying philosophy and significance embedded within them. In essence, the offerings associated with each activity may convey distinct interpretations and meanings. As noted by Septia (2024), each item included in the offering holds symbolic significance, embodying sacredness and serving as a gesture of reverence toward God, ancestors, and spiritual forces.

In the film *Pabrik Gula*, the tradition of offerings is vividly illustrated through a scene featuring ritual activities performed by a male and a female shaman. They placed offerings beneath a large tree and near an old warehouse within the sugar factory premises. This scene also captures the two shamans reciting a mantra in Javanese while gesturing with their hands.



Figure 2. The Scene Showing Two Shamans Presenting Offerins to Perform a Sacred Ritual in *Pabrik Gula*

Drawing on the role of offerings, which are frequently linked to rituals directed at spirits or supernatural entities as previously discussed, their presence in the film can undoubtedly contribute to an enhanced element of horror. However, the significance of making offerings in contemporary times has experienced a considerable transformation. The philosophy of *sasejan*, which traditionally embodies concepts of harmony, aesthetics, and noble values serving as a guide to a life of sanctity, is increasingly viewed as a misleading practice or ritual. This shift in perception arises from its perceived contradiction to established religious values (Hendrawan et al., 2015).

The evolving interpretation of offerings gradually becomes entrenched in societal perspectives, wherein they are increasingly linked to practices that diverge from traditional religious teachings. Consequently, the portrayal of offering rituals in horror films serves to reinforce the notion that such acts are meant to venerate supernatural entities, thereby implying that these entities are appeased and less likely to cause disruption or harm to humanity. The discourse surrounding the practice of making offerings is not intended to engage in a debate regarding the moral standing of this tradition, nor is it meant to assess its alignment or misalignment with religious principles. Rather, offerings represent a significant cultural practice within Javanese society, rich with meaningful messages and valuable life lessons for individuals. At its core, the significance and symbolism of an offering are intricately connected to the intentions and mindset of the individual presenting it.

Numerous ethnic groups across various regions of Indonesia acknowledge and engage in the tradition of presenting offerings for religious ceremonies, prayers, and acts of worship. This practice is, in essence, an significant element of Indonesian cultural heritage. From ancient times, the ancestors of the Indonesian people have created offerings as expressions of their spiritual beliefs and devotion. Furthermore, it is evident that the Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms that thrived in ancient Indonesia also embraced the tradition of making offerings, solidifying its importance in the country's historical and cultural landscape. Despite the diminishing prevalence of the "*sesajen*" tradition in urban areas and its decline in practice among younger generations, the tradition of *sesajen* continues to serve as a vital expression of

cultural identity and embodies the local wisdom of traditional communities in Indonesia (Adam et al., 2019). Thus, the depiction of offerings within the horror film functions not only as a mechanism to intensify the atmosphere of fear but also illustrates "*sesajen*" as an expression reflecting human reverence and devotion for nature. This image symbolically illustrates the intrinsic relationship between humanity and the cosmos. Furthermore, it emphasizes "*sesajen*" as a cultural tradition that warrants acknowledgment, respect, and preservation.

An offering, fundamentally an object, acquires its meaning through cultural frameworks shaped by human beliefs. Consequently, when an offering is intended for a concept associated with the supernatural or directed towards spirits, that specific meaning is inherently retained. An analysis grounded in the theory of representation reveals that the scenes depicting offerings to supernatural entities in the film serve to evoke not only a sense of mystique and horror but also convey deeper cultural significance. These offerings, which have been integral to Javanese tradition for generations, symbolize the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world. Nature, as a powerful force, underscores the necessity for humans - who occupy a minor role within it - to cultivate a harmonious and respectful coexistence with their environment.

### 3. The *Kuda Lumping* Traditional Dance

Javanese culture boasts a vibrant tradition of dance, among which the *Kuda Lumping* dance stands out as one of the most recognized. Predominantly practiced in Central Java, Yogyakarta and East Java, the origins of this dance remain undocumented. However, it is commonly expressed among Indonesians that the *Kuda Lumping* dance has its roots in East Java. According to Laraswati et al. (2023) there are various accounts that recount the origins of the *Kuda Lumping* Dance, for example, there is a version suggests it serves as a tribute to the cavalry forces of Prince Diponegoro, who resisted Dutch colonialism; another narrative claims the dance draws inspiration from the efforts of Raden Patah and Sunan Kalijaga in their battles against invaders; and additionally, some believe that the *Kuda Lumping* dance represents the military training conducted by the Mataram kingdom's troops during the reign of Sultan Hamengkubuwono I. In various regions of Java, this dance is alternatively referred to as the *Kuda Kepang* dance or *Jaranan*. A distinctive characteristic of this performance is the use of a woven bamboo horse as a prop. Nevertheless, the *Kuda Lumping* has firmly established itself as a significant element of Javanese heritage, frequently showcased during various traditional events and ceremonies.

In Javanese tradition, the *Kuda Lumping* dance is typically characterized by group dance formations adorned in vibrant costumes that reflect the cultural customs of each specific region (Hardiarini & Firdhani, 2022). In addition to serving as a form of entertainment, the *Kuda Lumping* art is frequently regarded as a mystical performance. This perception stems from the presence of ritual offerings, the burning of Benzoin incense (*Kemenyan*), and the observable phenomena of spirit possession among the dancers (Wahyudi et al., 2023). This perspective further amplifies the enigmatic allure of the *Kuda Lumping* dance. Dancers believed to be possessed by a spirit frequently demonstrate extraordinary abilities, including the chewing glass, traversing hot coals, rolling on the ground, and exhibiting resistance to sharp objects, among other feats. Such displays contribute to mesmerizing and entertaining spectacles that enthrall audiences.

Various iterations of the narrative surrounding the origins of the *Kuda Lumping*, along with the perilous behaviors exhibited by the dancers in a trance-like state, illustrate that the dance embodies strength. This representation of strength emphasizes the significance of resilience in overcoming the challenges and obstacles encountered in human life. The *Kuda Lumping* dance can be viewed as a powerful emblem of resilience, reflecting the historical narrative of the Indonesian people's fight against colonial domination. This dance reflects the

essence of strength, which is vital in the pursuit of triumph. Consequently, *Kuda Lumping* stands as a symbol of defiance and fortitude in the face of adversity.

In the *Kuda Lumping* dance, possession is a prevalent phenomenon that enhances the artistic expression of this performance. Such occurrences not only captivate spectators but also provide an exhilarating experience. This unique aspect imbues the *Kuda Lumping* dance with an otherworldly and creepy aura. It is therefore not surprising that this dance has been incorporated into horror films to amplify the eeriness. A notable example can be found in the movie *Pabrik Gula*, where a scene illustrates two shamans conducting a *Kuda Lumping* dance ritual aimed at communicating with the spirits residing within the factory, thereby mitigating potential terror and averting catastrophe.



Figure 3. The Kuda Lumping Dance Portrayed in A Scene of *Pabrik Gula*

The phenomenon of spirit possession in *Kuda Lumping* emphasizes the philosophical belief that humans occupy a minuscule role within the vastness of the universe. This tradition reveals that the ultimate strength resides in nature, rendering humans relatively powerless in comparison.

Through the *Kuda Lumping* dance, participants establish a connection between the human realm and the supernatural, highlighting the reverence that the Javanese people have for these supernatural entities. Such veneration is considered essential for maintaining balance in life, as individuals often acknowledge their limitations and seek the support of external forces to realize their aspirations (Suryaningputri et al., 2022). In conclusion, the traditional *Kuda Lumping* dance can be viewed as a representation of strength, encompassing both internal and external dimensions. This embodiment of strength is frequently intertwined with supernatural elements that hold sacred significance within Javanese culture.

#### 4. The Tradition of *Manten Tebu*

The phrase *Manten Tebu*, which translates to "Sugarcane Wedding", might not be well-known to individuals outside of Java. This local custom involves two key groups: the sugarcane farmers and the sugar factories located in the region. In basic terms, this tradition involves a ceremonial act of uniting two sugar cane stalks, conducted annually just prior to the commencement of the sugar cane milling season for sugar production. It is a traditional practice rooted in Central Java, widely recognized by many Javanese, particularly those residing in proximity to sugar mills. This annual event holds significant cultural importance in Central Java due to the proliferation of sugar mills during the Dutch colonial era. The tradition is celebrated as a ceremonial expression of gratitude preceding the commencement of the sugar milling season.

In certain regions of Java, this tradition is referred to as "*Cembengan*". It is typically commemorated through a sequence of activities, including wayang performances, offerings, sugar cane bridal processions, and a variety of evening entertainment options for the local community. In this context, the *manten tebu* tradition employs the symbolism of human marriage to represent the union of two sugarcane stalks within a sacred ceremony.

Additionally, it is important to note that each region in Java possesses its own distinct interpretation of the *manten tebu* tradition. Similar to many weddings in Java, the *Manten Tebu* ceremony incorporates traditional Javanese wedding customs. According to Abdila et al. (2024) this ritual comprises several key phases: selecting two stalks of the finest sugar cane, assigning names to them, adorning them to resemble a bridal couple, parading them from the sugar cane field to the sugar factory, conducting the Javanese wedding ceremony, and ultimately placing the two stalks into a sugar cane mill to signify the commencement of the sugar cane milling season.

The local community holds the view that the *Manten Tebu* tradition possesses the ability to bestow favorable outcomes upon sugarcane farmers and sugar factories and there is a prevailing belief that neglecting this tradition could result in negative consequences (Antikasari, 2023). Symbolically, the *Manten Tebu* tradition, typically celebrated in April or May, embodies the development of a constructive cooperative relationship between sugarcane farmers and sugar factories (Mauritio, 2025). In essence, this serves as a representation of gratitude and positive aspirations, as its purpose is to foster advantages and well-being for both local sugarcane farmers and the sugar factory from their endeavors. The symbolism inherent in *Manten Tebu*, as previously discussed, illustrates that this tradition is seen as a representation of success and harmony. Such interpretations undoubtedly evoke a positive connotation.

Within this tradition, the collaboration between sugarcane farmers and sugar factory proprietors exemplifies a constructive partnership, symbolizing a mutually beneficial relationship. The existence of sugar factories can significantly benefit the community, particularly sugarcane farmers. This tradition portrays this relationship and shows considerable significance. While the *Manten Tebu* ritual may exhibit aspects of mythology or sacredness in its ceremonial practices, Putra (2025) underlines that it is a symbolic representation of the community's aspirations for a successful sugar production process. This, in turn, fosters abundant yields and prosperity for the community. Therefore, it is essential to preserve this local tradition as a defining characteristic of Javanese society.

The depiction of the *Manten Tebu* tradition in the film *Pabrik Gula* plays a role as a potent symbol for the reinforcement of local cultural practices while simultaneously enhancing the film's overarching themes. Within this horror narrative, the unsettling supernatural occurrences set against the backdrop of a sugar factory effectively cast the *Manten Tebu* tradition as a ritual identical with sacredness, mystique, and an element of fear.



Figure 4. The *Pabrik Gula* Film Version of the *Manten Tebu* Ritual

One of the most intense scenes in the film revolves around the *Manten Tebu* tradition. This ritual necessitates that a couple found guilty of infidelity within the factory's hallowed warehouse become sugarcane brides, destined to be sacrificed in order to placate the spirits of the factory. It is important to note that this portrayal significantly diverges from the authentic *Manten Tebu* ritual concerning its meaning, intent, and practices.

It is essential to emphasize that the film adaptation of *Manten Tebu* portrays a marriage between a male adulterer and a female adulteress as a form of sacrifice. In contrast,

the original *Manten Tebu* tradition symbolizes the union of two sugar cane stalks, representing prosperity for sugar cane farmers and sugar factories. Nonetheless, the scene, along with the evolving interpretation of *Manten Tebu* within the film, is essential in cultivating a sense of horror and mystique. While the portrayal of *Manten Tebu* in the film diverges from its original tradition, its representation holds considerable significance for the film's audience. The film has facilitated the recognition of this local tradition among audiences from various regions in Indonesia as well as international viewers. Moreover, it enables the younger generation to recognize and value the richness and distinctiveness of Indonesia's diverse cultures, which encompass artistic, philosophical, moral, sacred, and mystical values.

### Conclusion

The preceding discussion focuses on several key insights regarding the depiction of local traditions in the film *Pabrik Gula* (2025). It features four distinct local Javanese traditions, depicted through various scenes. These traditions include the *Wayang* performance, the practice of making offerings (*sesajen*), the traditional *Kuda Lumping* dance, and the *Manten Tebu* ritual. *Wayang* performances, which show a diverse array of puppet characters, encapsulate a range of human traits and qualities. Additionally, the ritual of making offerings (*sesajen*)—typically placed in sacred sites—serves as a poignant reflection of the connection between humanity and the natural world. Moreover, the traditional *Kuda Lumping* dance, characterized by the trance-like states experienced by its performers, can be understood as a manifestation of strength. Lastly, the *Manten Tebu* tradition may be viewed as a symbol of success and prosperity.

These four traditions are predominantly found in Java, particularly in the regions of Central Java, Yogyakarta, and East Java, and they play a significant role in various activities and ceremonies, including those related to births, weddings, and cultural events. The commonality shared by these four Javanese traditions lies in their association with rituals that embody mysticism and a sense of the sacred. The viewpoint that equates these traditions with the supernatural presents a significant opportunity for their incorporation as scenes in the horror film *Pabrik Gula* to enhance the eerie atmosphere of the film. Additionally, they also serve to introduce film audiences, particularly the younger generation, with Javanese local traditions, thereby reflecting the cultural richness and pride of Indonesia. Finally, this study indicates that films have the potential to highlight diverse local traditions and cultural values, which are essential for enriching the audience's understanding. Additionally, it is anticipated that this study will inspire further investigation into the influence of representing local traditions in cinema on fostering a greater knowledge and appreciation of Indonesian culture.

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