

John Fiske's Semiotic Analysis of Moral Education in “Budi Pekerti” Film

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Abstract

This study used qualitative research with John Fiske's semiotic approach. This research aimed to reveal the reality, representation, and ideology regarding moral education in the film by Wregas Bhanuteja entitled “Budi Pekerti”. The film had a high artistic aesthetic and was full of meaning. Film is an audio-visual media that combines both elements, namely narrative and cinematic. This study employed the semiotic method by John Fiske as the research method. The signs shown in this film pointed to moral education which was currently a crisis in Indonesia. Reality, representation, and ideology regarding moral education were conveyed through conversations, choice of color tones, settings, soundtracks, and scenes. The results of the study showed that the film depicted current reality especially regarding the moral values in the society in Indonesia context. This also showed how current development of information and technology has strong correlation with people's behavior especially related to moral values.

Keywords: Semiotics, Film, Moral Education

Introduction

In an article about Character Education Policy and Its Implications for Learning in Indonesia's Education System by Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE), it was found that when they asked education stakeholders from national to school levels about challenging issues in education, they seldom mentioned these worryingly low results on academic skills. Instead, these stakeholders emphasized other issues affecting students: moral degradation, reflected by violence including bullying, drug use, free sex, and teenage pregnancy. National policymakers are particularly concerned about systemic cheating on national exams. In their view, the need for education to address these societal issues overshadows the urgency to address low learning outcomes. In essence, morale is an important aspect of human resources. A person with high intellectual abilities can be useless without good morals or have low morals. Etymologically, the word moral comes from the Latin word ‘*mos*’, the plural form is ‘*mores*’, which means procedures or customs. Widjaja (1985, as cited in Hayumuti & Hidayat, 2019) states that morals are good teachings and bad about actions and behavior. Huky (as cited in Fitri & Na'imah, 2020) formulates a more comprehensive understanding of morals, namely:

1. Morals are a set of ideas about life behavior, with certain basic colors held by a group of people in a certain environment.
2. Morals are teachings about good life behavior based on a certain view of life or religion.

3. Morals are human life behavior, which is based on the awareness that he is bound by the necessity to achieve good, following the values and norms that apply in his environment.

On the other hand, social reality to date shows that there are many cases of moral violations in everyday life. Quite a few of the perpetrators came from highly educated and intellectual circles. Law no. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education system explicitly states in Article 3 that the objectives of national education include, among other things, developing the potential of students to become human beings with noble character and high morals. However, the formulation of the Law is not implemented in the curriculum or national education policy. The film is a bridge to convey moral values.

Film is an audio-visual communication medium that not only provides entertainment, but also offers information, and can even touch the emotions of the audience. According to Pratista (2008), film is an audio-visual media that combines two elements, namely narrative and cinematic. The narrative element itself is related to the theme, while the cinematic element is the plot or storyline that is coherent from beginning to end. Films have various types and genres. These include action, comedy, documentary, drama, horror, romance, science fiction, thriller and fantasy.

"Budi Pekerti" is a film in the drama genre that tells the story of the life of a Guidance Counseling (BK) teacher named Mrs. Prani, played by Ine Febriyanti, who suddenly went viral on social media. She had an argument with one of the visitors while queuing to buy *putu*, a Javanese traditional steamed cake. Without realizing it, someone recorded the incident but the recording did not depict the reality. In the video, Mrs. Prani looked as if she was having a dispute and was behaving inappropriately with the *putu* seller. The viral video then triggered negative responses from social media users. Mrs. Prani's attitude in the video was considered inappropriate because it did not reflect her personality as a teacher. Because of this video, Mrs. Prani was also threatened with being expelled from the school where she taught.

Not only her career, but the problems that came were getting bigger, and Mrs. Prani's family was also affected. Her two children, namely Tita (Prilly Latuconsina) who was running a thrift shop business, and Muklas (Angga Yunanda), a content creator about animals, were also criticized, judged, and targeted. Mrs. Prani's two children finally helped to solve this problem. They also ensured their father, Didit (Dwi Sasono), did not know about this. They were worried about Didit's mental health because he was suffering from depression.

Mrs. Prani faced many conflicts, starting from the problem of her viral video, her career, her family's economic problems which had been affected by COVID-19, and even the feud with her two children. On the other hand, Mrs. Prani had to be able to show her integrity as a teacher in dealing with her students during her image which was no longer good. The film *Budi Pekerti* was shown in Indonesian cinemas and at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) with the international title "Andragogy".

Andragogy, literally, means a learning process that involves adults in the structure of the learning experience. Of course, this is connected to the premise of the story which has the theme of the family life of a guidance counselor. The choice of the word Andragogy was quite similar to the title *Budi Pekerti*. This film, which was written and

directed by Wregas Bhanuteja, had been premiered in cinemas throughout Indonesia on November 2nd, 2023. This film had many implied and explicit meanings regarding moral education or character itself amidst the onslaught of the digital world, starting from the scenes, soundtrack, color tones, and settings.

This paper focused on studying the film by employing the semiotic method by John Fiske. The social code of the level was the result of the level of reality and the level of representation which is categorized into acceptance and social relations by ideological codes, such as capitalism, individualism, race, patriarchy, and so on. The results of the study were expected to provide the insight into how a film could depict reality with the given issue.

Research Method

This research used a qualitative descriptive method of media text analysis using John Fiske's semiotic analysis approach. John Fiske's semiotic theory states that something shown on television media, usually in films or advertisements, is a reality, facts that occur in people's lives or social reality with the intention that reality is a product created by society or humans itself. The research subject of this study was Budi Pekerti film. The subject of this research was divided into several pieces or scenes which the author analyzed.

Data collection techniques in this research covered observation by directly observing and watching the film Budi Pekerti. The observation was made by using scenes or clips from the film, literature review, and documentation. The primary data for this research were obtained directly in this research by observing or observing the research object. This research did not only use direct observation. However, the observation was made by watching and listening to the content or story of the film Budi Pekerti by watching the film in the cinema because this film was still being played at the time the research took place. The secondary data was obtained from other accessible sources.

In semiotics, the science of signs, there are two main concerns, namely the relationship between signs and their meaning and how a sign is combined into a code. According to Fiske, the codes that appear or are used in television programs are interconnected to form a meaning. In its development, John Fiske's model is not only used to analyze television shows but can also be used to analyze other media texts, such as films, advertisements, etc. (Sutanto, 2017). In the television codes expressed in John Fiske's theory, events broadcast on television have been encoded by social codes which are divided into the following three levels:

1. First, the level of reality of events which are marked (encoded) as the reality of appearance of clothing, environment, behavior, conversation, gestures, expressions, sounds, and in written language in the form of documents, interview transcripts, and so on.
2. Second, levels of representation encoded electronically must be displayed in technical codes, such as camera, lighting, editing, music, and sound. In written language, there are words, sentences, photos, and graphics, while in picture language there are cameras, lighting, music editing, and others. This element is then transmitted into a symbolic code that can actualize characters, narrative, action, dialogue, and setting.

3. Third, level of Ideology. All elements organized and categorized in moving images in films are the product of a particular ideology. These ideological codes such as individualism, patriarchy, class, race, materialism, capitalism, and others.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data taken from the film, the results of the analysis are presented based on three aspects including level of reality, level of representation, and level of ideology. The results and discussion are presented as follows.

Level of Reality

In the opening scene, it was shown that Mrs. Prani was a teacher at a junior high school. The reality was shown to show that this film was about education. It could be seen that the clothes worn by the majority of the actors were yellow and blue as well as other elements. Such as the scooter that Mrs. Prani wore, earphones, the background cloth that Mrs. Prani wore when recording herself to clarify problems, tents, and so on.

The yellow and blue colors in the film represented education where teacher uniforms were identical by using those two colors. Apart from that, the writer and film director, Wregas Bhanuteja, also acknowledged that this color choices was inspired by the colors of a book entitled "*Pendidikan Moral Pancasila*" which was used to teach Indonesian students the moral values of Pancasila ideology (Hardiantoro & Pratiwi, 2023).

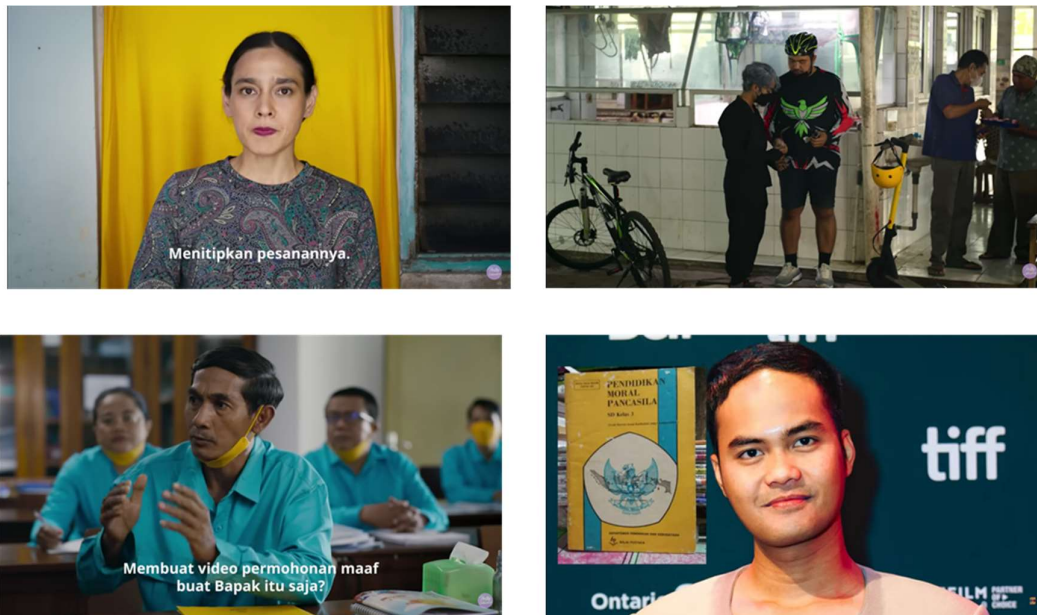


Figure 1. Yellow and Blue Colors in Budi Pekerti Film

The scenes and conversations in the film Budi Pekerti were also full of the reality of moral education. When Mrs. Prani was queuing for *putu* for her husband, she met someone who, according to Mrs. Prani, did not want to queue by joining the existing line

behind people who arrived first. Therefore, Mrs. Prani approached the person and reprimanded him so that a conversation occurred.

“Kalau Bapak sudah dapat nomor ya dipatuhi dong itu baru namanya adil, semua dapat jatah sesuai jam mereka datang. Jangan menyerobot seperti itu!”

(If you've got a number, please obey, that's fair, everyone gets their share according to the time they come. Don't barge in like that!).

Queuing has surely become good habit in many cultures including Indonesia. However, as depicted in this film, there were still people who did not obey this. In the scene, the man with whom Mrs. Prani had an argument about the queuing was the one who looked highly educated with, relatively, high economic background. The bicycle and branded clothes he wore implicitly showed that. Nevertheless, such background seemed to be contradictory with the fact that he did not want to queue.

“Dia ini saudara saya yang datang sejak awal untuk mengantriikan”

(This is my brother who came from the start to queue), admitted the man to justify his behavior).

Even though the reality was before the eyes of many people, the man kept arguing. He even accused Mrs. Prani again, in which he taught that Mrs. Prani was the one who did not accept it and did not want to queue. Unfortunately, the incident did not stop there. This even affected Mrs. Prani's life further because the incident had gone viral on the social media.

During the selection of vice principals, the judges asked about Mrs. Prani's case which was going viral on social media, Mrs Prani explained that this was just a misunderstanding where she was not shouting at the *putu* seller nor cursing "*Asu*" (Dog) but, instead, "*Ah suwi*" (So Slow) Mrs Prani also promised that she would solve the problem by clarifying this to parents who felt disturbed by the video. On the other hand, the committee forbade it by saying:

"Tidak perlu dibesar-besarkan bu, jika nanti ada orang tua murid yang bertanya tinggal bu Prani berikan surat kronologi yang sebenarnya versi Bu Prani, bu"

(There's no need to exaggerate ma'am if later there are parents who ask questions, just give Mrs. Prani the actual chronology letter, ma'am), said the female judge, with her fellow male jury adding,

"Dan juga bagi yang tidak bertanya tidak perlu memberikan klarifikasi, bu"

(And, for those who don't ask, you don't need to provide clarification, ma'am).

This scene showed that in social reality many people hid the truth because they were afraid of being blamed. This is another moral problem that occurs in people's lives which is also raised in this film. The phenomenon of a decline in the character of a person or group of people. There are 10 indications of moral decline that need attention in order to change in a better direction; 1) violence and acts of anarchy, 2) theft, 3) cheating, 4)

ignorance of applicable rules, 5) brawls between students, 6) intolerance, 7) use of bad language, 8) early sexual maturity and deviation, 9) self-destructive attitudes, and 10) drug abuse (Lickona, 2013 as cited in Cahyo, 2017).

In another scene, a group of teachers were doing exercises for a sporting competition where Mrs. Prani was also taking part. However, the members of the group joining this activity objected to wear the same yellow pants as worn by Mrs. Prani due to the viral incident. As a solution to the problem, the instructor thought that after the practice they would buy new trousers at the Beringharjo market. Beringharjo Market itself is a market located in Yogyakarta. The city, in which the scene took place, is known as a city of education. Besides, Yogyakarta is also famous as a royal city where customs are highly respected.

In one scene, Tita said:

"Ada yang bilang seharusnya pelajaran budi pekerti dikembalikan ke sekolah"

(Some people say that character lessons should be returned to schools) her voice sounds desperate.

The reality described in this conversation implied disappointment that, as if, the teaching of moral education was no longer seen important in academic context. Of course, this is not true. In Indonesia, character building has been regulated in the national education system. There are eighteen values that teachers need to integrate in learning including religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, creative, independent, democratic, curious, nationalist, patriotic, appreciates achievements, friendly and communicative, loves peace, likes to read, environmentally conscious, socially concerned, and responsible (Supranoto, 2015).

Character building that represents moral values should not be only taught theoretically, but should be implemented to be the part of habits. Surely, a challenging part of character building is the related to the fact that this can take a long time to see the changing behavior in positive way (Nurroini et al., 2020). Unfortunately, character building, still, needs to be promoted.

In the next example of dialogue, another moral aspect was depicted. In the scene, there was a discussion about what Mrs. Prani could do to solve her problem.

"Kalau saya usulkan agar persoalan ini cepat selesai bagaimana kalau bu Prani bikin video permohonan maaf untuk bapak itu saja? Satu hari saja setelah itu dihapus"

(If I may suggest, how if Mrs. Prani just recorded an apology video for the man? Just one day after that you can delete it.)

This sentence showed the reality of being selfish where a school teacher seemed that he only thought about the image of the school by ignoring Mrs. Prani's point of view in which she did not think that asking for apology was necessary due to the fact that she was not the one who made mistake. This form of clarification is also now widespread on social media where people who have made mistakes are forced to apologize via social

media in the hope that after that the problem will be resolved even though the effects of the problem are not that easily resolved, especially without meeting face to face or deliberating.

In many cases of beatings and abuses, it is quite easy for the perpetrators to apologize in the social media by explaining that the cases are only parts of jokes and/or childish acts. For example, there was an incident where woman blasphemed Tri Rismaharini, an important figure in Surabaya, some time ago. That was a clear example of how the inability to control oneself led to an apology. (Machmud NS, 2021).

In another example, a young person at a mosque intimidated a person who wore face mask by shouting. Finally, the man had to apologize because of that incident. In addition, most recently, a woman who got angry with officers blocking homecoming traffic in Serang ended up admitting she had made a mistake (Machmud NS, 2021). In reality, behind many incidents, victims of abuse do not just need an apology but also sanctions that must be given to the perpetrators because those caused trauma to the victim, and so on.

When Mrs. Prani, Mukhlas, and Tita tried to find the account of the person who was entrusted with the *putu* queue by the man who did not want to queue, Tita saw the social media trend and mentioned it in front of Mrs. Prani and Mukhlas.

"Ono trending guru BP biang fitnah."

(There is the viral news about BP teacher got accused of doing something she didn't do).

Here, it was explained that Mrs. Prani was a guidance counselor who was supposed to teach and implement the moral values. However, the incident while queuing seemed to be contradictive with what she was supposed to behave both personally and professionally. Of course, the narration was made only based on the viral video which was untrue.

In Indonesia context, guidance counselors are not only the ones are responsible to discipline students with problems either academically or non-academically but also the ones who are ready to listen to students who need to share their thoughts and feelings. Besides, guidance counselors are mostly expected to be role models in many aspects of life in positive ways. This common knowledge was the base why Mrs. Prani had to face such a problematic issues.

In the following part of the film, Tita tried to help her mother by looking for who the perpetrator was. When she found them, a group of video blogger, she immediately went to their base camp and said several things, including the following sentence:

"Kalian cuma clickbait untuk cari duit, sok-sok peduli sama penderitaan orang lain. Tapi ujung-ujungnya kalian cari founding, cari sponsor."

(You guys are just click-baiting to make money, pretending to care about other people's suffering. But in the end, you are looking for a foundation, looking for a sponsor).

The reality shown in this conversation seemed to insinuate those who created content in cyberspace about caring for other people even though they only wanted to

go viral and gain personal profit, thus ignoring the morals and personal interests of the person whose suffering was being raised.



Figure 2. Tita with a Group of Video Blogger

In this scene, it was also shown that cell phones and social media were like weapons that could silence other people, by making someone's actions viral with short video clips. Tita's silence in this case after the whole room pointed the camera at her symbolized that even someone could be afraid of a weapon called a mobile phone with social media in it.

The buzzer phenomenon was originally used to promote certain products but has recently turned into a machine for spreading hashtags and wild information which is difficult to validate. The way to do this, among other things, is by encouraging trolls to create discussions here and there based on conspiracy theories to heat the situation. (Ibrahim, 2020).

At the end of the story, the conflict did not meet the expected solution, it only got better for a while, but then the problems arose again so that the family which was initially united in solving the problem fought because the father disappeared. In this scene, Mukhlas said:

“Aku iki ngerti mama ora salah, tapi sak iki salah opo bener iki mek perkoro sopo seng luwih akeh ngomong. Neng kene netizen mikir mama seng salah. Aku wis gak mikir citraku mah brand-brand wis tak cul. Iki sesi paling abote awakdewe ning HP ne wong liyo iki mek sak notifikasi mah”

(I know that you aren't wrong, but right or wrong is only about who mostly speaks. In this case, netizens think you're wrong. I don't think about my image, I just throw away all my brands. It's very hard for us, on other people's phones it's just one notification).

In this scene, Mukhlas hoped that his mother or Mrs. Prani could apologize via social media for a mistake he never made and asked social media users to help find her husband.

This showed that the power of social media could pay for everything, including easily distorting facts. Ethics was no longer a priority because each individual did not meet face to face. Criticizing via social media was very easy, things like this were sometimes also applied by the current generation in everyday life, especially students

who were studying at home during Covid-19 and did not meet their teachers or lecturers directly.

Recent studies have also elaborated on the negative impacts of social media, creating problems such as cyberbullying, Facebook depression, sexting, and exposure to inappropriate content. The negative impact of social media can cause moral decadence for the younger generation (Arianto, 2022).

Level of Representation

Regarding the second level, the level of representation, this film used the soundtrack "Dan Hujan I" by Gardika Gigih. The music with its lilting strains represented the scenes of sadness, disappointment, and fragility regarding the reality in today's society. This was when Mrs. Prani and her family had to move as the consequence of the problems they faced. Visually, the moment was accompanied by rain that made the nuance become more heart breaking.

Another level of representation occurred when Mrs. Prani sit quietly in front of the shop and behind her there was an *odong-odong* spinning while a son "Antri Dong" was playing accompanying it. At that time, Mrs. Prani covered her ears with earphones so that the sound of the music could not be heard. This represented that currently many people do not want to listen to other people's advice, especially regarding queuing. Just because people are in a hurry, they ignore the others. This of course is in contrast to moral education, one of which is to obey the queue.

The death of morality was also represented in the film Budi Pekerti when Gora, who was a former student of Mrs. Prani, took her to the cemetery to show her previous work when she was given a reflection by Mrs. Prani. In this scene, Mrs. Prani cried accompanied by raindrops.



Figure 3: Mrs. Prani and Gora at the Cemetery

Level of Ideology

The ideological level in this film was depicted through the figure of Mrs. Prani who finally gave up and left the school where she worked. It was basically related to the credibility of the institution. Mrs. Prani and her family decided to move to start a new life due to the fact that environment was no longer supportive. This is a culture of social sanctions that is still inherent in Indonesian society, where people who appear most guilty will be ostracized and avoided without seeking further information.

Through the film *Budi Pekerti*, the story of the crisis in moral education in Indonesia was told, especially after the emergence of the internet, and even more so after Covid-19. The figure of the guidance counselor represented by Mrs. Prani who was persecuted depicted a portrait of education currently at a crisis level. There are many cases of students who abuse teachers and even have the heart to kill teachers. Unfortunately, parents and guardians defend their children's mistakes. The portrait of social media as the most important weapon in life is also depicted in the scenes of this film, the fact that it can be reversed only by the power of the media.

The rapid development of technology has been part of human life. A notable phenomena regarding the use of IT is that there are lots of teenagers use social media to share their daily activities. Unfortunately, they do not always use their social media positively. There were cases where teenagers bad things, bad feelings, and other negative posts that bring negative impact to their personal lives (Lisnawati et al., 2021).

Conclusion

In the film “*Budi Pekerti*”, which was analyzed using John Fiske's semiotics, three social codes were found. The first being was level of reality through the color tones used, in which yellow and blue were mostly used, conversations, settings, and scenes that presented codes regarding the condition of moral education in Indonesia. Next, the second level, namely representation, was depicted through soundtracks, songs that played, rainy conditions, and graves that represented disappointment, sadness, and fragility towards moral education. The last one was the ideological level which was depicted in the figure of Mrs. Prani as the main character who gave up and resigned from her position as a teacher and also moved from her residence because there was no support from those around her. This has become something that happens very often where those in power will justify, especially with the media, news from remote villages can easily spread throughout the country.

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