

The construction of fear in Indonesian contemporary horror films: A multimodal analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how semiotic systems operate in contemporary Indonesian horror cinemas to construct meaning and provoke emotional responses, particularly fear. Horror films often draw from socio-cultural contexts, embedding local values, anxieties, and collective memory into their narrative and aesthetic choices. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how multimodal elements—visual, auditory, and narrative—interact to create a heightened sense of horror and reflect deeper cultural concerns. Focusing on three prominent films: *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion*, *KKN di Desa Penari*, and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput: Ayat 2*, this research employs a multimodal analytical framework to examine the interplay of lighting, image composition, symbolism (visual mode); soundtrack, sound effects, and non-verbal cues (audio mode); and cultural themes involving social and supernatural issues (narrative mode). The methodology involved a qualitative analysis of selected scenes from each film, identifying key semiotic cues and their affective functions. The findings reveal that horror is constructed through the synergistic interaction of visual darkness and tension, unsettling audio layers, and culturally resonant narratives. These elements work together not only to elicit fear but also to express societal anxieties related to religion, tradition, family, and the unknown. The conclusion emphasizes that Indonesian horror films function as cultural texts that both entertain and offer socio-cultural commentary. By highlighting the communicative power of horror cinema, this study contributes to film and cultural studies while opening pathways for future interdisciplinary research on genre, identity, and audience reception.

Keywords: Contemporary horror films; emotional effects; Indonesian cinematography; multimodality; semiotic system

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INTRODUCTION

Emotional construction refers to how emotions are formed, understood, and expressed within a specific social and cultural context (Frenzel et al., 2021; Schoon, 2021; Šimić et al., 2021;). This concept relates to the view that emotions are not entirely biological or natural, but are influenced by factors such as social norms, personal experiences, and interactions with others (Chen & Antonelli, 2020).

One critical dimension of emotional construction is its embeddedness within social cultural contexts (Saroglou et al., 2020). Emotion can vary across cultures. What is deemed an appropriate emotional response in one sociocultural setting may be considered inappropriate or even unintelligible in another. Moreover, the construction of emotion is intricately linked to linguistic practices and processes of labelling. The act of naming and

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interpreting emotions through language significantly shapes the way individuals experience and internalize them (Foolen, 2022; Nandwani & Verma, 2021). For example, the words used to describe emotions can shape the way people think about their emotional experiences. Social interaction is another aspect of emotional construction. Emotions are often formed in the context interactions with others (Lal et al., 2023; Simanjuntak & Hasanuddin, 2022; Van Kleef & Côté, 2022). For instance, the responses of others to an individual's emotional expressions can significantly influence the manner in which those emotions are experienced and subsequently conveyed. The ways in which individuals learn to manage and interpret emotions over time are informed by their previous affective encounters, which subsequently shape future emotional experiences and behavioural expressions (Li et al., 2020). This can be observed in how past experiences shape individuals' feelings and expressions of emotions in the future.

Constructed emotions include various types of emotions. The first is basic emotions consisting of happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust (Dong et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2022; Ortony, 2022). There are social emotions consisting of love, shame, guilt, and empathy (Faccini et al., 2020). In addition, complex emotions such as nostalgia and anxiety also play an important role in shaping human experience (Yang et al., 2022). Each emotion is influenced by the socio-cultural context, as well as the norms that regulate how a person expresses it. When a person or group has an achievement, respect and pride are often associated as a form of recognition. Conversely, if someone feels that their social expectations are not met, they will feel ashamed and guilty. Understanding how emotions are formed can enhance one's comprehension of human interactions and the social dynamics that occur in their environment.

In cinemas, the involvement of various semiotic system plays an important role in constructing emotions by combining various modes of communication, such as visual, audio, verbal, and kinesthetic, to create a deeper experience (Juntunen, 2020; Mills et al., 2022; Zhang, 2024). For example, the combination of frightening images and tense background music can increase feelings of fear and tension. In addition, facial expressions and body language during interactions help convey emotions that may not be expressed verbally (Pantano, 2020). In this case, cultural elements, such as symbols and rituals, can evoke certain emotions in the appropriate context (Dupuis, 2022; Ramos et al., 2024). The involvement of various semiotic tools as a multimodal approach to making meaning makes the construction of emotions more complex and diverse, allowing one to feel and understand emotions in their entirety (Ezzameli & Mahersia,

2023; Gandhi et al., 2023; Kalateh et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). The use of multimodal elements can also trigger stronger and longer-lasting emotional responses, as the human brain processes information from multiple modes simultaneously (Fernández-Rodicio et al., 2022; Pinto et al., 2023; Yen et al., 2023). By combining multiple modes, emotional messages can be delivered more effectively and reach a wider audience (Bashirzadeh et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). In addition, multimodal elements used in the cinemas also enable the creation of a more individualized experience, where each individual can interpret the emotional message based on their own experiences and cultural background (Raptis et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024; Zeng et al., 2024). In the context of advanced communication, multimodal elements are increasingly important as social media and instant messaging applications allow users to share different types of content, such as text, images, video, and sound, all of which can contribute to the construction of complex emotions.

The use of multimodal elements in cinemas emphasizes the importance of various modes of communication in constructing meaning (Bateman, 2022). The use of multimodality includes the interaction between visual, audio, narrative, and kinesthetic elements that work together to create a holistic viewing experience (Honegger et al., 2021). A literature review of this theory shows that multimodal analysis does not only focus on one aspect of the film but also considers how various elements collaborate to convey messages and emotions (Al-Saadawi et al., 2024; Gandhi et al., 2023; Mills & Stone, 2020; Sari, 2024). By integrating a semiotic perspective, this research can further explore the meaning contained in each element of the film, as semiotics allows for the identification of signs and symbols used to construct meaning. For example, the color red in a scene not only serves as a visual element, but also carries rich cultural and emotional connotations, such as violence, passion, or danger. Multimodal-semiotic analysis is used to uncover the layers of meaning hidden beneath the surface of visual texts, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of how films communicate with audiences (Alcaraz et al., 2024; Michelson et al., 2022). Furthermore, this approach can also identify the ideologies and values embedded in a film, as well as how it represents social and cultural realities. Semiotic systems in film can be divided into several types (Jamabshi & Ghazvineh, 2023), including: visual semiotic system: includes elements of color, symbol, and space, which are used to create atmosphere or indicate character emotions, audio semiotic system: includes music and sound effects, which serve to evoke emotions and add depth to the viewing experience, and narrative semiotic system: focuses

on story structure and characters, which influence how the audience perceives the storyline.

In Indonesian horror films, for instance, the color red is often used as a symbol for blood, violence, and death, and carries deep emotional connotations (Natalie & Haryono, 2024). Religious symbols, such as crosses and religious rituals, are often used to create tension and add depth to the story (Sulaeman et al., 2022.). The semiotic system not only conveys meaning, but also creates emotional effects, such as fear and anxiety. Visual and audio elements work together to evoke strong emotional reactions. Providing information about the setting, plot, and characters, this system helps the audience understand the context of the story (Roth, 2021).

The construction of emotion in horror cinema is not solely reliant on narrative content but is deeply rooted in the multimodal interplay of visual and auditory elements. While existing scholarship has extensively examined emotional mechanisms in international horror films, Indonesian horror cinema remains relatively underexplored. Thus, this present study investigates three contemporary Indonesian horror films published in 2022—*Pengabdi Setan 2*, *KKN di Desa Penari*, and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput: Ayat 2* to examine how narrative, visual, and audio modalities synergize to elicit intense emotional responses. Employing a multimodal analytical framework, this research elucidates the ways in which these semiotic resources collectively construct fear and suspense. Furthermore, the study situates these cinematic techniques within the broader social and cultural contexts of Indonesia, thereby offering critical insights into the culturally embedded nature of emotional construction. The integration of visual and audio elements enhances the immersive experience by engaging the audience's senses and heightening emotional responses (Salselas et al., 2021). The synergy between images and sounds enhances tension and anxiety, creating an atmosphere that reinforces the themes of the films. Additionally, the role of culture and personal experiences is crucial in interpreting signs in horror films (Gong & Zhang, 2021). Each audience member brings a unique cultural background and life experiences that affect their interpretation of signs in the films. Spatial elements, such as the use of space and layout, are crucial in building a frightening atmosphere. A narrow and dark space, for example, can reinforce a sense of entrapment and apprehension, while the use of unusual camera angles can create tension and confusion for the audience.

Research on the multimodal construction of emotions has argued that the concept of understanding how fear and anxiety is constructed through the interaction of various communication elements, including visual imagery, sound, and narrative has emerged (Krysanova, 2023; Noad &

Barton, 2020; Zheltukhina et al., 2023). In this context, visual elements, such as dim lighting and dramatic camera angles—can create a tense atmosphere (Abed, 2021; Fahlenbrach, 2021). Sound effects and immersive background music enhance the sense of fear. In addition, the verbal language used in dialogue can add emotional depth, providing a richer context for the character's experience (Hicks et al., 2024). Thus, these multimodal elements construct the emotion of fear in horror films through at least the following indicators: (1) fear and anxiety, such as screaming sounds and music that create a tense atmosphere, (2) tension and mystery, namely the use of unexpected symbols and visual elements, and (3) discomfort and disorientation in the form of unusual camera angles and distorted visual effects that create feelings of uncertainty (Millar & Lee, 2021).

A review of the literature on Indonesian cinematography shows a rich history and development, with horror films as one of the genres that has attracted attention (Fa et al., 2023; Noer, 2021; Prasetya, et al., 2024). Since its inception, Indonesian cinematography has undergone significant changes, reflecting existing social and cultural dynamics (Adiprasetyo, 2023; Barker, 2024; Liu et al., 2020). Indonesian cinematography began in the early 20th century, with the first films produced by local film makers (Barry et al., 2022; Purnama et al., 2023; Ulum et al., 2021; Utami, 2024). Although initially influenced by foreign cinema, these films began to adopt themes and stories reflecting local culture.

Horror films, which raised supernatural and mythological themes, began to emerge as a popular genre, providing new discourses on people's fears and beliefs. In the 1980s and 1990s, the genre began to gain more attention, with the emergence of iconic films that combined traditional and modern elements (Hanan, 2021). Entering the 21st century, Indonesian horror films have experienced a revitalization with the support of modern technology, allowing filmmakers to explore new themes (Adiprasetyo, 2023).

Films such as *Pengabdi Setan* (2022) and *Kuntilanak* (2018) have not only been commercially successful but have also gained international recognition (Lestari & Sihombing, 2022). These films often raise relevant social issues, creating resonance with the audience. Indonesian horror films serve not only as entertainment but also as a reflection of society's collective fears and anxieties (Adiprasetyo, 2023). By exploring local elements, horror films are able to touch on deep and complex issues, enriching the audience's understanding of society. This study aims to add to the many studies in revealing scary emotions by focusing on the following research questions: How do the visual, audio, and narrative elements work together in Indonesian horror films to evoke horror?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a multimodal analytical framework to investigate how various semiotic modes—such as text, image, sound, movement, and spatial configuration—converge to construct meaning within cinematic discourse. Multimodal analysis offered a lens through which to examine the intricate and simultaneous orchestration of communicative resources that shaped audience interpretation. Specifically, this research focused on the interaction among visual, auditory, and narrative modalities in selected horror films, drawing on the theoretical contributions of Baldry and Thibault (2010) and Bordwell and Thompson (2009). Multimodal analysis allowed researchers to explore how these elements contribute to the formation of meaning and emotional experiences of the audience. By integrating various cinematic aspects, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how horror films convey relevant themes and messages.

Data Selection

In this study, three contemporary Indonesian horror films were selected as samples for analysis. The selection of these films was based on certain criteria, including popularity, theme relevance, and representation of significant cinematic elements in the context of the horror genre (McCullough, 2021). The film selection criteria included:

1. Popularity, films that had received widespread attention from audiences and critics, so that they can represent trends and preferences in the current Indonesian horror film industry.
2. Theme relevance, films that raised social, cultural, or psychological themes that are relevant to society, allowing for in-depth analysis related to cultural context and collective fear.
3. Representation of cinematic elements, films that clearly displayed visual, audio, and narrative elements that can be analysed multimodally, providing rich insights into how these elements interact to build a tense atmosphere. (See table 1 for more details of the criteria).

Table 1

Three Indonesian Horror Films Based on Details of Each Criterion

No.	Data Code	Movie Title	Popularity	Relevance Theme	Representation Cinematic Elements
1	HM-1	<i>Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion</i> (2022)	- Sequel to the best-selling film <i>Pengabdi Setan</i> (2017) - High box office hit and much talked about on social media	- Explores themes of family and sacrifice. - Touches on the relationship between generations and the impact of tradition	- Captivating cinematography with strong image composition. - Sound effects that create a gripping atmosphere
2	HM-2	<i>KKN di Desa Penari</i> (2022)	- Viral on social media, becoming a topic of conversation on various platforms. - Getting a lot of viewers in cinemas.	- Raising the theme of local beliefs and myths. - Reflecting the collective fear of the mystical in culture.	- Strong visuals with an authentic village setting. - Effective use of music to heighten tension.
3	HM-3	<i>Sebelum Iblis Menjemput: Ayat 2</i> (2022)	- A successful sequel, attracting a new audience. - Widely recognized among horror fans.	- Tells of revenge and the consequences of character choices. - Highlights the theme of the haunting power of the past.	- Captivating cinematography and evocative use of visual effects. - Music and sound that enhance the suspenseful experience.

Note: HM = Horror Movie

By selecting three contemporary horror films, this study analyzed how each film used cinematic elements to create a creepy emotional experience. Furthermore, a montage was selected that represents each film as the most terrifying scene. The most terrifying scene in HM-1 was found when Tari hid in the garbage chimney and the most terrifying scene in HM-2 was when Widya was surrounded by the Utomos (2022a, 2022b). Furthermore, the most terrifying scene in HM-3 was when the scene showed interactions with the devil's book in an old house in the middle of the forest (Waluyo, 2020).

Data Collection

The data in this study were collected through the process of watching films and recording examples of multimodality used to create a creepy emotional effect. This method was designed to allow researchers to directly observe how various cinematic elements contributed to the viewing experience. The data collection process included:

1. Conducting systematic and in-depth screenings, with a particular focus on three contemporary Indonesian horror films that had been selected as samples. Each screening was carried out

under optimal conditions to ensure full attention to visual and audio details.

2. Recording multimodal examples, during the viewing process to record various multimodal elements covering visual elements include color, lighting, image composition, and symbolism; audio elements, namely music, sound effects, and dialogue that contribute to the tense atmosphere; and narration, namely systematic recording, this study was expected to produce in-depth insights into the process of creating meaning and emotional experience in Indonesian horror films.

The data collection provided a strong basis for further analysis, allowing researchers to draw informative and relevant conclusions regarding the use of multimodality in the horror genre. The data collected in this study were analyzed by using the multimodal analysis framework to explore and understand how visual, audial, and narrative elements worked together to create a creepy emotional effect in Indonesian horror films.

Data Analysis

This study employed a multimodal data analysis framework comprising three primary analytical dimensions. First, the **visual analysis** focused on elements such as color schemes, lighting techniques, image composition, and symbolic representations across the selected films. Particular attention was paid to how these visual modalities constructed atmosphere and the audience's emotional engagement with fear and suspense. Second, the **audio analysis** was conducted to examine the role of musical scores, sound effects, and dialogue in generating affective intensity and narrative cohesion. This analysis also involved the inter semiotic interplay between auditory and visual elements in shaping the overall emotional resonance. Third, the **narrative analysis** explored the structure of the storyline and the development of characters, aiming to uncover how narrative progression and character dynamics contributed to emotional elicitation and the articulation of horror. The patterns and interactions of these semiotic resources were analyzed to elucidate how the convergence of visual, auditory, and narrative modes produced a sustained sense of horror. The overarching aim of this analytical approach was to generate a comprehensive understanding of the multimodal strategies employed in Indonesian horror films and their role in evoking collective fear and anxiety. Guided by the theoretical frameworks of Baldry and Thibault (2010) and Bordwell and Thompson (2009), this study was expected to offer nuanced insights into the affective and cultural dimensions of horror cinema.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Visual, Audio, and Narrative Elements in Indonesian Horror Films to Evoke Fear and Horror

Indonesian horror films combine visual, audio, and narratives elements to create a very scary atmosphere. Detailed visuals such as dramatic angles and dim lighting increase tension, while eerie sound effects and soundtracks arouse the audience's emotions. Strong narratives and suspenseful plots with characters emotions and detailed backgrounds allow viewers to make an emotional connection. The combination of these elements creates an intense horror experience that instill deep fear and dread in its audience. The following shows the results of the research on each dataset, containing visual frames, visual images, and kinesics actions, as well as explanations of visual, audio, and narrative elements that work together to arouse fear and horror.

Table 2 indicates a night scene when there was a storm and a power outage. Tari saw the appearance of the *Pocong* and *Raminum* and ran away in fear. Not only that, she also found that Ustad Mahmud had also died with his neck slashed. Tari immediately panicked, and unfortunately, she hid in the chimney where Toni threw away his radio. At the end of her life, Tari heard a radio broadcast mocking her as a candidate for hell. The pregnant woman's *Pocong* also appeared and vomited her baby, making Tari even more frightened. Finally, she fell down with broken bones.

In Table 3, the dark, narrow, and blood-red visual elements created a tense and claustrophobic atmosphere, as if imprisoning Tari's character in a terrifying horror situation. Supported by the light of a flashlight shining on the wall, producing shadows added to the impression of mystery and darkness. Tari's frightened facial expression strengthened the emotional tension. In terms of audio, the terrifying sounds of nature, such as strong winds, thunder, and approaching footsteps, further sharpened the tense atmosphere. The tense music added to the emotional intensity, while Tari's panicked screams and the taunts from the radio deepened the trauma she experiences. In terms of narrative, the main conflict depicted is Tari's struggle to survive in the midst of a very terrible situation, reaching a climax when she hears the radio's taunts and then witnesses other terrible events. The resolution that showed Tari falling and being seriously injured gave a sense of despair that envelops this scene. The collaboration of these three elements effectively built a very tense and oppressive scene, making the audience feel as if they were feeling the fear and despair experienced by Tari's character.

Table 2
Multimodal Transcript of HM-1 Data

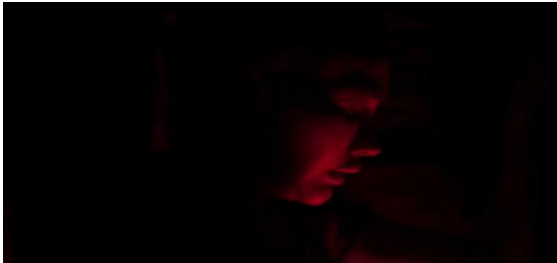
Data Code	HM-1
Time	Visual Frame
100:57	
101:27	
101:30	
Source	Pengabdi Setan 2/Satan's Slaves 2 (2022) Horror Movie - video Dailymotion
Visual Image	CP: Stationary HP: Frontal VP: Median D: CS (Close Shot) VC: Sleeveless shirt VS: Garbage flue entrance and garbage flue. CR: Black, white, reddish CO: Naturalistic
Soundtrack	Panting and radio sounds
Kinesics Action	[Eyes widen, sweat and tears come out, mouth opens, whole body trembles]

Table 3
Visual, Audio, and Narrative Elements Are Used and Work Together in Indonesian Horror Films of HM-1 Data

Visual Elements	Audio Elements	Narrative Elements
1. Light, the use of flashlight light directed at the wall creates a tense and mysterious atmosphere. The shadows produced by the flashlight light also add to the horror impression. 2. Space, the dark and narrow space gives the impression of claustrophobia and increases the sense of fear. 3. Facial expression, Tari's facial expression full of fear and panic is very pronounced, strengthening the tense atmosphere. 4. Color, the dominant use of red creates a very scary and bloody atmosphere. 5. Darkness, total darkness makes it difficult for the audience to see clearly what is happening, so that the audience's imagination will run wild. 6. Color: The dominant red color shows that the tense atmosphere continues.	1. Sound, the sound of strong winds and thunder will add to the tense effect of this scene. 2. Music, the use of tense and tense music will further strengthen the horror atmosphere. 3. The sound of footsteps, which are slowly approaching, will make the audience feel tense and anxious. 4. The sound of screams, full of panic, will make the audience feel their fear. 5. The sound of the radio, which mocks Tari, will add to the trauma and despair of Tari's character.	1. The main conflict in this scene is Tari's struggle to survive in the midst of a very terrible situation. 2. The climax of this scene is when Tari hears a radio broadcast mocking her and sees a pregnant woman's <i>Pocong</i> vomiting her baby. 3. The resolution of this scene is Tari falling and suffering serious injuries.

Table 4
Multimodal Transcript of HM-2 Data

Data Code	HM-2
Time	Visual Frame
136:34	
136:35	
Source	KKN di Desa Penari: Luwih Dowo, Luwih Medeni (2022) 1080p Malay Sub - Bstation (bilibili.tv)
Visual Image	CP: stationary HP: frontal VP: median D: MCS (Medium Close Shot) VC: Plain blue short sleeve shirt VS: Dance studio CR: Black, brown, gray CO: Naturalistic
Soundtrack	Gamelan sounds, gasping breath
Kinesics Action	[hands protect body, sweat and tears come out, whole body trembles, eyes narrow and eyebrows knit together]

Table 4 presented a night scene, in the dance studio, when Widya was trapped physically and mentally by *Badarawuhi* in the dance studio and was surrounded by spirits who showed their true forms. Widya herself at that time, did not make a

pact with *Badarawuhi* and did not hold the two heirlooms belonging to the spirits. Therefore, she could still be saved by Mbah Buyut, who guided her home in the form of a black dog.

Table 5
Visual, Audio, and Narrative Elements Are Used and Work Together in Indonesian Horror Films of HM-2 Data

Visual Elements	Audio Elements	Narrative Elements
- Shows a dark and cramped atmosphere in the dance studio. There are many people gathered, showing tension. Widya's face looks scared and trapped, expressing deep anxiety. The outstretched hands can depict a sense of urgency and panic. - Dim lighting creates a tense atmosphere, adding tension to the scene. - Shows more people with more varied expressions, some looking depressed and others showing aggressive attitudes. Widya looks more centered, showing that she is the main focus in this situation. - The unclear background adds an element of mystery and highlights the chaos that is happening around her.	- Background sound, noisy sounds from the crowd, such as shouts, whispers, or loud voices that create a tense atmosphere. This sound can strengthen the feeling of being trapped that Widya feels. - Dramatic background music can be used to increase the intensity of emotions, with a dark or scary tone.	- Conflict, the narrative depicts Widya as a character trapped in a threatening situation. She has no power to fight back because she does not hold the heirloom, thus highlighting the theme of helplessness. - The description of <i>Badarawuhi</i> and the spirits show the existence of supernatural powers that influence human life, creating tension between the real and mystical worlds. - The presence of Mbah Buyut as a helper adds a dimension of hope to the story. This shows that even in desperate circumstances, there is a possibility of being saved, giving a complex nuance to the narrative.

In Table 5, the dark, claustrophobic, and gripping visual elements created a strong atmosphere of tension. Supported by dim lighting, scared facial expressions, and hands that look gripped, these images successfully visualized the critical situation experienced by Widya's character. Meanwhile, noisy background sounds and dramatic music sharpened the audio elements, strengthened the gripping impression, and increased the tension felt by the audience. In terms of narrative, the

conflict between Widya, *Badarawuhi*, and the *Lelembut*, as well as the emergence of the savior figure Mbah Buyut, provided a strong background to understand the situation depicted visually and audibly. With effective collaboration between visual, audio, and narrative elements, these images were able to build a scene full of tension and mystery, so that the audience could be emotionally involved in Widya's experience.

Table 6
Multimodal Transcript Data HM-3

Data Code	HM-3
Time	Visual Frame
34:13	
34:14	
Source	https://www.bilibili.tv/id/video/2040310580
Visual Image	CP: Stationary HP: Frontal VP: Median D: CS (Close Shot) VC: Blue shirt and black t-shirt VS: Old orphanage kitchen wall CR: Black, white, blue, brown CO: Naturalistic
Soundtrack	Instrumental music sound
Kinesics Action	[eyes widen, mouth open, teeth showing, eyebrows drawn together, face tense] Tempo: F

Table 6 showed a scene that occurred in the late afternoon in an old orphanage in the middle of the forest. After dripping his blood on the devil's book, Alfie suddenly had a vision of Mr. Ayub performing a ritual in the basement of the orphanage's kitchen. Mr. Ayub was then burned to death by the orphanage children, who were upset with his treatment of them.

Overall, the narrative created an atmosphere full of tension, mystery, and strong emotional conflict. These three elements, when combined,

created a cohesive and immersive experience for the audience. The frightening visuals, evocative audio, and strong narrative worked together to build an intense atmosphere of horror. By combining these three aspects, the audience not only saw the story, but also felt the fear and tension experienced by the characters, making the viewing experience more immersive and memorable (see table 7 for more details of multimodal interaction).

Table 7

Interaction of Visual, Audio, and Narrative Elements in Indonesian Horror Films of HM-3 Data

Visual Elements	Audio Elements	Narrative Elements
1. Lighting. The blue-green lighting creates a mystical and tense atmosphere, suitable for the context of an old orphanage in the middle of the forest. The shadows that appear add to the impression of uncertainty and darkness, as if depicting the atmosphere approaching night. 2. Facial expression. The character's frightened and tense facial expression reflects the psychological impact of the vision experience he experienced. Wide eyes and a slightly open mouth indicate shock and horror at what he witnessed. 3. Image composition. Close-up shots of the face focus attention on the character's emotions and reactions to the supernatural experience he experienced. The empty space around the character gives the impression of isolation, as if he was trapped in a tense environment. 4. Story context. The setting of an old orphanage in the middle of the forest creates a mysterious and eerie atmosphere. Alfie's character's vision of the devil's ritual and the burning of Mr. Ayub adds a supernatural and horror dimension to the story. The anger of the orphans towards Mr. Ayub illustrates the conflict and violence that occurs in the environment.	1. Background sound. The sounds of nature around the old orphanage in the middle of the forest the background audio that creates a tense atmosphere. The wind howls, branches crackle, and the faint sounds of nocturnal animals can add to the impression of silence and isolation. The presence of mystical or supernatural sounds that are faintly heard, as if there is supernatural activity around the place. 2. Character voices. Alfie's gasps and groans when experiencing the vision can describe the fear and horror he feels. 3. Ritual sound effects. Mystical jingles, whispered spells, or magical sounds can accompany the scene of Mr. Ayub's ritual in the basement.	1. Context of the story. The setting of an old orphanage in the middle of the forest creates a very isolated and tense atmosphere. This context depicts an environment that holds mystery and potential danger, in accordance with the strong horror genre. The afternoon approaching night adds to the impression of darkness and uncertainty that surrounds the events that occur. 2. Character and emotion. Alfie as the main character becomes the focal point of the narrative, with his supernatural and traumatic experiences. His frightened and tense facial expressions reflect turbulent emotions, as if trapped in a terrible situation. Pak Ayub as the antagonist is depicted as a figure who holds a dark secret, who ultimately becomes a victim of violence. The orphanage children who burned Pak Ayub show a strong conflict and resentment against the mistreatment they experienced. 3. Conflict development. The narrative will build tension through Alfie's supernatural experience after dripping his blood on the devil's book. The conflict will peak when Alfie has a vision of the dark ritual carried out by Pak Ayub. The climax occurs when Pak Ayub is brutally murdered by the orphanage children, depicting extreme revenge. 4. Emotional effects. The narrative that tells Alfie's traumatic experience will provoke fear, anxiety, and helplessness in the audience. The burning of Mr. Ayub by the orphanage children will create feelings of horror, hatred, but also sympathy for the victims of torture.

The results of the analysis shows that the combination of visual, audio, and narrative elements in Indonesian horror films significantly contribute to the emotional experience of the audience. For example, the use of dim lighting and eerie background sounds not only creates a scary atmosphere but also reflects the collective fears that exist in society. However, it is important to note that although these films are successful in evoking fear, they may also create certain stereotypes about local culture and traditions. In addition, this analysis is

limited to only three contemporary horror films that may not represent the entire spectrum of Indonesian horror cinematography. This limitation may affect the generalizability of the research results, so further research is needed to explore other films from a wider range of genres and periods.

Visual Element Explanation

The use of light and shadow in the data creates a tense and mysterious atmosphere. The flashlight light directed at the wall casts shadows that distort

reality, evoking a sense of fear and uncertainty. Coupled with the dim blue-green lighting, the atmosphere becomes even more mystical and creepy. The cramped, dark and obscure setting further reinforces the feeling of isolation and threat. The characters' facial expressions filled with panic and fear, as well as their restless body movements, successfully transmit these emotions to the audience. The dominant use of red as a symbol of blood and violence, as well as the mystical blue-green shades, further enriches the visual palette, which is loaded with symbolic meaning. The context of the story, which involves an old orphanage and satanic rituals, adds to the sense of horror.

Audio Element Explanation

Sound design in Indonesian horror films often utilizes elements that create a gripping and suspenseful atmosphere. The combination of natural sounds such as howling winds and booming thunder, with minor background music, successfully evokes a sense of fear and dread. The sounds of slowly approaching footsteps, panicked screams and mysterious whispers further heighten the suspense. The use of mocking radio voices and sounds of mystical rituals add a psychological dimension to the story, and hint at the lurking presence of supernatural forces. Meanwhile, noisy background noises from the crowd, create a feeling of isolation and threat.

Narrative Element Explanation

The narrative elements in the data combine the elements of classic horror with a contemporary twist. The main conflicts faced by the characters, such as the struggle for survival amid supernatural threats and violence, create a gripping atmosphere. The isolated backdrop of the old orphanage and the supernatural events further amplify the horror feel. Complex character development, such as Alfie who was deeply traumatized and Mr. Job who kept a dark secret, adds depth to the story. The climax of the story, which involves mystical rituals and violence, has a strong shock effect on the audience. These narrative elements can evoke a range of emotions, from fear and anxiety to sympathy and anger.

The results of the analysis show that visual, audio, and narrative elements in Indonesian horror films interact synergistically to create a deep frightening effect. As expressed by Solanas & Getino (2021), effective cinematography is the result of the integration of various elements, where each component contributes to the overall experience of the audience. In this study, for example, the use of dim lighting and carefully selected image compositions create tension, while sound effects and gripping soundtracks reinforce the atmosphere. As indicated by Zhang (2022), tension

in horror films often arises from a combination of mutually supportive audio-visual elements. In the context of this study, narrative elements that raise social and supernatural issues provide a framework for the audience to understand the fears faced by the characters, thus creating a stronger emotional resonance. The interaction between these elements not only enriches the viewing experience but also creates a deeper meaning about the collective fears that exist in society.

Based on semiotic studies, visual elements dominate as the main language in conveying meaning in Indonesian horror films compared to audio or narrative elements. This can be seen from the use of strong visual symbols, such as dramatic lighting, creepy settings and costumes. These visual elements directly evoke the emotions and imagination of the audience, creating a visceral and memorable atmosphere of horror. In addition, visuals also play an important role in building characters and advancing the plot of the story. Thus, visuals have become the most effective tool for conveying messages and meanings in Indonesian horror films.

This research shows that visual elements dominate the conveying of meaning in Indonesian horror films. This finding is in line with the semiotic view that emphasizes the importance of visual signs in the construction of meaning. Reflecting on Roland Barthes' theory (in Sembiring et al., 2023), this study highlighted visual elements in Indonesian horror films that have denotative (literal) and connotative (symbolic) meanings. Based on the data, this visual element in the form of dark lighting has a denotative meaning as a lighting condition but connotatively brings up feelings of fear and mystery. As found in this study, horror films that create fear, use visual elements to control emotions (see Ammer, 2021; Kattelman, 2022). This research shows that the power of visuals shape how we see society as a whole, experience emotions, and create emotions in the context of horror films. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of visual culture (in Ni, 2024), this research contributes to the understanding of how cultural visualization affects the way we understand the world. Indonesian horror films, with their distinctive visualizations, create cultural representations of fear, death, and supernatural powers, thus forming a unique and distinctly Indonesian cultural identity.

In terms of cinematography, the data of this study involved dim lighting to understand how it creates a tense and mysterious atmosphere. The composition that places Widya as the main focus, surrounded by people with various expressions, also emphasizes the sense of entrapment experienced by the characters. These techniques are in line with Bordwell's thoughts on how cinematography can be an effective means of conveying meaning (Sohn, 2022). The lighting in the film, namely dim lighting

and cold color choices, not only set the atmosphere but also supported the dark narrative. Effective mise-en-scene in film can create an immersive visual experience (Mahdavi et al., 2023), and in this case, the use of close-up composition on Alfie's face is very effective in accentuating the character's emotions and reactions.

From a cultural perspective, the data reveal how Indonesian horror cinema intricately weaves local belief systems into its narrative structure, particularly those grounded in supernatural traditions. The depiction of figures such as the *Pocong*, *Raminom*, and a spectral pregnant woman who expels infants can be interpreted as cinematic manifestations of Javanese mythological archetypes, rich in mysticism and deeply embedded within communal cultural consciousness. These representations serve to reinforce the atmospheric intensity of the horror narrative by invoking culturally resonant symbols of fear. Moreover, the character of Ustad Mahmud, whose death by throat-slitting carries suggests an underlying tension between institutional religious authority and enduring traditional or syncretic belief systems. Such portrayals underscore the complex and often ambivalent interplay between the sacred and the supernatural within Indonesian society (Sarwindah & Sihombing, 2022). A dark background provides a deeper dimension to the narrative (Sarwindah & Sihombing, 2022). This opens up space for discussions on social issues such as violence, power and oppression in the context of local culture, negotiation and exchange between traditional and modern elements.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The study only included three films, which may not fully represent the full spectrum of Indonesian horror cinematography. Furthermore, limitations in data collection and analysis may affect the generalizability of the results. For example, despite the in-depth analysis, the audience's diverse responses to the elements were not fully explored. These limitations suggest the need for further research that could involve more films and more diverse methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of multimodal techniques in horror films.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and analysis of visual, audio, and narrative elements in Indonesian horror films, especially *Pengabdian Setan 2: Communion*, *KKN di Desa Penari*, and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput: Ayat 2* (all published in 2022), it can be concluded that the three elements interact with each other to create a deep and complex horror atmosphere. Visual elements, use of lighting, space, and facial expressions in the three data effectively create a tense atmosphere. The flashlight and dark room in

HM-1 add to the sense of mystery, while the frightened expressions of characters such as Tari and Alfie (HM-2 and 3) strengthen the emotions experienced. The dominant red color also adds to the horror atmosphere. Next, audio elements, audio elements play an important role in building tension. The sound of wind, thunder, and tense music in HM-1, as well as the sound of screams and footsteps in HM-2, increase anxiety. The mocking sound of the radio in the context of the character's trauma adds depth to the emotional experience. Last, Narrative elements in the three data present strong conflicts and evocative resolutions. Tari's struggle and Widya's helplessness create tension, while Alfie's traumatic experience adds an emotional dimension. The revenge of the orphanage children illustrates the complexity of social conflict, bringing all the elements together to create a profound experience for the audience. Overall, the combination of these three elements not only creates a suspenseful experience but also provokes thought about deeper issues in a cultural and social context.

So far, language or verbalization cannot be relied upon to convey the complexity of emotions and cultural nuances contained in horror films. Strong visualization can create a gripping atmosphere, evoke deep emotions, and at the same time become a window to understand the cultural values underlying the story. Thus, Indonesian horror films are not only entertaining, but also a reflection of the nation's soul.

Some recommendations from the results of this study are the first, interdisciplinary approach, further research can adopt an interdisciplinary approach by combining theories from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of horror films on audiences. The second comparative studies, conducting comparative studies between Indonesian horror films and horror films from other countries can provide insight into the differences and similarities in the use of visual, audio, and narrative elements. This will help in understanding the broader cultural context. The third, audience response analysis, using qualitative methods, such as interviews or surveys, to understand the audience's emotional reactions to the elements used in the film. This will provide a deeper perspective on how these elements contribute to the viewing experience, and the last exploration of specific themes, focusing on specific themes in horror films, such as gender, power, or trauma, to explore how horror films reflect and critique relevant social issues in society. By continuing research in this direction, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the complexity and power of horror films as a medium for conveying fear and cultural reflection can be gained.

It is further suggested that future studies include more films from different genres and time

periods, so as to provide a more comprehensive picture of Indonesian cinematography. In addition, involving audience responses through qualitative methods, such as interviews or surveys, can provide deeper insights into how multimodal elements are perceived and received. Further research can also explore different cultural contexts to understand how these factors influence audience interpretations and experiences.

Such practices are important for multimodal studies because they allow researchers to understand the complex interactions between different elements in the media, and how these interactions shape experiences and meanings for viewers. By adopting a broader and deeper approach, future research can enrich the literature on cinematography and make a more meaningful contribution to understanding the social and cultural dynamics reflected in films.

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