

Semiotic Perspectives of Indonesian Horror Movie Posters

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Abstract- This research investigates the semiotic dimensions of horror movie posters and how they use signs and pictures to communicate their genre-specific messages. The poster was selected for a popular horror movie in Indonesia. The verbal and visual signs on these posters were analyzed using semiotic theory as explained by Chandler (2007), studying the meaning of verbal and visual signs in terms of connotative and denotative meaning by Barthes (1968) and Cerrato's (2012) theory for interpreting the meaning of colors. Observation and note-taking techniques were used to collect data for this study. The data of this research was analyzed using the descriptive qualitative method. This research shows that selected posters effectively use dark, sinister imagery and bold, jagged typography to convey their horror themes. For instance, the use of a giant skull formed by twelve wrapped corpses in the "Siksa Kubur" poster creates a ghoulish and creepy image that resonates with cultural fears of death and the supernatural. The posters expressed both connotative and denotative meanings. Combining these elements creates a persuasive and engaging narrative that resonates with the cultural and supernatural themes prevalent in Indonesian horror. The posters, beyond being elements of the story, also act as marketing tools, effectively capturing and holding the audience's attention by using meaningful cultural symbols and emotions. These discoveries have important implications for filmmakers and marketers, indicating that a thorough grasp of cultural semiotics can improve horror films' narrative impact and market appeal.

Keywords: Verbal Sign, Visual Sign, Poster, Horror, Semiotics

L INTRODUCTION

Semiotics is a fascinating and complex field that delves into the study of signs and symbols and their profound impact on human communication, cultural interpretation, and the creation of meaning. Semiotics, influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, shows how signs create and understand meaning. A sign can take on various forms, such as words, images, sounds, gestures, or physical objects. Regardless of its form, a sign surpasses its immediate representation and conveys a deeper meaning. According to Bonvillain (2019:1), language is an integral part of human behavior, enabling humans to convey thoughts, emotions, ideas, and information. As human

beings, we have many ways of communicating with each other, including language and signs to express ourselves. Communication can be divided into verbal and visual (Pratiwi et al., 2021).

Semiotic meaning, therefore, refers to how these signs convey particular messages and are interpreted within specific cultural and social contexts. The analysis of signs can be divided into two types: the verbal sign and the visual sign. The concept explained by Chandler (2007: 27) involves the definition of verbal signs as elements dealing with written or spoken text and words. On the other hand, visual signs encompass images or gestures that are not articulated but are still capable of conveying meaning. According to

Saussure (1983: 101), in the study of signs, it is essential to understand that a sign comprises two key components. The first component is the signifier, which refers to the sign's physical form. The second component is the signified, representing the concept or idea conveyed by the signifier. This framework allows a deeper analysis of how visual elements construct and communicate meaning. Movies are a form of media that carries the responsibility of conveying underlying messages to society. Movie posters, in particular, play a key role in this communication process. They utilize verbal cues such as words, clauses, phrases, and non-verbal elements like signs, colors, symbols, and artwork.

The movie industry attracts widespread public interest across the country. A movie can reflect culture, address social and political issues, or various aspects of society. A movie always comes with a poster to promote the movie. Posters are a popular medium used by various parties to convey messages or information because posters are attractive and striking (Putri & Nurochman, 2021). Movie posters are designed with careful attention to symbols and signs, as they are often the first thing potential viewers notice. In the context of movie posters, visual images, color, and typography communicate information about the movie and evoke specific emotional reactions in the viewer.

This study investigates the semiotic elements of Indonesian horror movie posters to understand how visual and verbal signs convey cultural narratives and evoke emotional responses. Horror is a genre that evokes strong emotional reactions in the audience: fear and respectively. Indonesia's movie industry has grown worldwide, especially in the horror genre. The researcher analyzes four famous movie posters with many verbal and visual sign features. The movies "*Siksa Kubur*" and "*Badarawuhi*" are famous Indonesian movies with a total of viewers, watched by more than 4 million in cinemas. In contrast, "*Kuyang*" and "*Sinden Gaib*" are Indonesian movies that made it to the top 10 on Netflix. The movie's genre made it very popular and critically acclaimed, and the poster is widely known for symbolizing the movie's plot. The implicit messages of the posters for the movie are conveyed through verbal and visual signs. There have been many related studies in semiotics over the past year. The first relevant literature was taken from an article entitled "Semiotic Analysis Found on Jordan Peele

Horror Movie Poster US" by Dimara et al. (2023). The previous study is relevant to the current one, as it demonstrates how every symbol and sign, including verbal and nonverbal features, used in a film effectively conveys its meaning through association. This study analyzes the verbal and nonverbal elements of US movie posters to illustrate how they collaborate in conveying meaning to audiences and capturing their attention. The second previous study used by the researcher is an article by Anggraheni et al. (2024), "Semiotic Analysis of the "*Sewu Dino*" Film Poster: Unveiling Visual Narratives and Cultural Symbolism". The research explores the complex meanings conveyed through the visual elements of the poster, highlighting the significant impact of visual communication in conveying the essence of the film to its audience. This study is particularly relevant because it focuses on the fusion of Javanese culture and the celebration of death, emphasizing the poster's role in capturing the richness of tradition. The third related study is an article entitled "Analysis of Movie Poster Using Peirce's Semiotics" by Rezeki & Sagala (2023). The recent study revealed Indonesian folklore in the data, which is relevant to the previous study. The film poster for "*KKN di Desa Penari*" also included cultural elements to create a strong traditional impression, just like the current study, conveying a cultural message through the poster.

The fourth study consists of an article by Dewitri et al. (2023), "The Analysis of Verbal and Visual Signs in "Annabelle Comes Home and The Curse of La Llorona" Horror Movie Posters." The study is relevant to the current research as it analyzes the significance of verbal and visual cues used in horror movie posters. These cues are intended to provide information about the movie and generate interest among viewers. The fifth related article by Wati et al. (2023) was entitled "The Meaning of Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs of *Insidious* Film Poster." The previous study analyzed verbal and non-verbal signs on the *Insidious* film poster and explained their meaning, while the current research examines the richness of semiotics found in Indonesian horror movie posters.

Based on the information provided, it is clear that the current study identifies a crucial gap in research when compared to the related literature review. Compared to existing studies, this research uniquely contributes by focusing on Indonesian horror movie posters, an area less

explored than other researchers. It expands the use of semiotic theories to a new cultural context, emphasizing the interaction between local cultural symbols and global horror themes. This study analyzes the semiotic study of horror movie posters, exploring how they use symbols, figures, colors, and phrases to communicate Indonesian folklore and legends. Despite the extensive research on horror film semiotics and marketing strategies, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the semiotic analysis of Indonesian horror movie posters. While Western horror media has been widely studied, Indonesian horror's unique cultural and semiotic elements have not been covered extensively. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed semiotic analysis of Indonesian horror movie posters, highlighting the interplay between local cultural symbols and global horror tropes. By doing so, it extends the application of semiotic theories to a new cultural context and offers fresh insights into the visual communication strategies employed in Indonesian horror cinema.

II. METHODS

The data presented in this study were taken from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website. The horror movie posters were taken from the year 2024. The posters were picked because selected posters are deeply rooted in Indonesian folklore and horror traditions. Analyzing these posters allows a rich exploration of cultural symbols and narratives unique to Indonesian horror. This study employed the observation method for data collection, using the note-taking technique to complement the process. The observation method in this study was implemented by selecting four Indonesian horror movie posters from the year 2024, chosen for their cultural relevance and visual representation of Indonesian horror themes. The selection criteria focused on posters that prominently featured traditional Indonesian folklore and symbolism, ensuring that the visual and verbal elements were deeply rooted in local narratives. The year 2024 was chosen to capture the most current trends in Indonesian horror cinema, reflecting the latest developments in film marketing and design. The observation process focused on several specific aspects of the posters, including imagery, typography, color schemes, and compositional elements. Special attention was given to how these visual components work together to convey horror themes and evoke emotional responses from the audience. During

the observation, detailed notes were taken following a structured framework to ensure consistency and thoroughness and how these elements enhance the sense of menace and danger. The analysis was carried out using the qualitative method.

Multiple researchers participated in the observation and coding process to minimize individual bias and ensure consistent analysis. The collaborative approach enabled cross-checking and validation of interpretations, preventing a single perspective from unduly influencing the semiotic readings of the posters. Additionally, the researchers used a standardized coding framework based on Chandler's (2007), Barthes's (1968), and Cerrato's (2012) semiotic theories to ensure consistent application of theoretical concepts across all posters. Regular discussions were held to reconcile differing interpretations, and any discrepancies were resolved through consensus, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

The study analyzes four Indonesian horror movie posters (*Siksa Kubur*, *Kuyang*, *Badarawuhi*, and *Sinden Gaib*) through a semiotic lens, focusing on both verbal and visual signs to uncover their connotative and denotative meanings. Drawing on Chandler's (2007) semiotic theory, the research operationalizes his concepts of signifiers and signifieds in both visual and textual elements to explore how the posters convey cultural narratives and evoke emotions. In addition, Barthes's (1968) theory of denotative and connotative meaning is used to describe the signs, and Cerrato's (2012) theories are employed in the qualitative analysis to examine imagery, typography, color schemes, and compositional elements. The data analysis is presented using both informal and formal methods. Formal methods involve using structured frameworks or coding to analyze the data systematically. For instance, the formal analysis includes a picture and its signified meanings (e.g., fear, death, the supernatural). Informal methods refer to descriptive narratives that provide a detailed account of the visual and verbal signs observed in the posters. For example, a descriptive narrative might detail how the depiction of a *pocong* (a traditional Indonesian ghost) in a poster impacts the audience.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the semiotic elements of verbal and visual signs in Indonesian horror

movie posters. Under the heading “Analysis of Verbal Signs,” the research delves into the textual elements such as titles, taglines, and other written content that contribute to the narrative and thematic undertones of the posters. The verbal signs in Indonesian horror movie posters, including titles, taglines, and other textual elements, are crucial in conveying the horror theme and attracting audience interest. Using Barthes' (1968) framework, this study analyzes these textual elements' denotative and connotative meanings.

In the “Analysis of Visual Signs” section, the focus shifts to the imagery, colors, and symbolic elements visually representing the genre. The visual signs, encompassing imagery and color schemes, are analyzed using Barthes' (1968) semiotic theory and Cerrato's (2012) color interpretation framework. The analysis was presented by giving a brief explanation of the sign. In addition, this analysis focuses on the meaning, especially the connotative and denotative meanings carried by the signs. This two-layered approach helps to identify the direct information conveyed, the underlying implications, and the audience's perceptions shaped by these signs.

The movie posters for “*Siksa Kubur*,” “*Kuyang*,” “*Badarawuhi*,” and “*Sinden Gaib*” share similarities and differences in their use of visual and verbal signs to convey Indonesian horror themes. They all employ dark color schemes, such as black and red, to evoke fear and mystery and incorporate cultural references like *pocong* and *Kuyang* to resonate with local audiences. The typography is bold and jagged, enhancing the sinister tone. However, each poster differs in specific imagery: “*Siksa Kubur*” features a giant skull formed by wrapped corpses, symbolizing death; “*Kuyang*” portrays a headless woman's body with a floating head, hinting at possession and terror; while “*Badarawuhi*” and “*Sinden Gaib*” incorporate traditional elements tied to their folklore. Verbal messages also vary, with “*Siksa Kubur*” challenging beliefs with *Anda akan percaya* (you will believe), and “*Kuyang*” emphasizing danger with *Siang kau diburu malam kau dimangsa* (hunted by day, devoured by night). Additionally, different production companies add a layer of branding, reflecting varied storytelling styles within the genre. Furthermore, the analysis of each poster's verbal and visual signs is described as follows.

3.1 The Analysis of *Siksa Kubur* Movie Poster



Figure 3.1 “*Siksa Kubur*” Movie Poster

The Analysis of Verbal Signs

In Chandler's (2007) semiotic theory, a verbal sign is any part of communication that uses language, like words, phrases, or text, to express meaning. The movie posters feature verbal signs that are insightful and warrant in-depth analysis. The title “*Siksa Kubur*” (signifier) translates directly to “Torture of the Grave” (signified), indicating a narrative centered around the suffering associated with death and the afterlife. “*Siksa Kubur*” is an Indonesian term that refers to the “punishment of the grave” or “torment of the grave”. “*Siksa Kubur*” is derived from Islamic texts, including the Quran and Hadiths. The Hadiths, in particular, describe Munkar and Nakir's questioning and subsequent rewards or punishments. The phrase suggests eternal punishment, moral reckoning, and the supernatural. It resonates with audiences' existential anxieties. The denotative meaning is the primary, literal interpretation of a sign, while the connotative meaning encompasses the associated cultural and emotional implications (Chandler, 2007: 137). The message conveyed by *Siksa Kubur* appears to offer a thoughtful critique or contemplation of the prevailing societal beliefs regarding the afterlife and ethical retribution. It suggests that rather than bringing tranquillity, death may result in an extension or intensification of the individual's earthly tribulations. This perspective seems to resonate with deeply ingrained fears and cultural narratives about the enduring consequences of one's choices and behavior throughout life.

The tagline in the poster creates a sense of interest in watching the movie. “*Anda akan percaya*” means “you will believe”, implying that

the audience will have a belief or faith after watching the movie. This tagline is the thought of one of the main characters in the film, Widuri Puteri, as one of the actors who does not believe in religion or sin after death. Then, as the director, Joko Anwar answered through the sentence 'you will believe'. In a connotative sense, the phrase evokes a sense of challenge and foreboding. It suggests that the movie will present events or phenomena so compelling and frightening that they will transform skepticism into belief, tapping into deeper themes of fear and the supernatural. In this way, viewers are invited to question their own beliefs and fears about what is unexplainable, thereby increasing its psychological impact.

Come and See Pictures was founded by Joko Anwar in 2020. In 2022, Come and See Pictures released the film "*Pengabdi Satan 2*", directed by Joko Anwar, which attracted more than six million cinema viewers. In addition, the company released a popular web series titled *Nightmares & Daydreams* on the Netflix streaming platform in 2024, which became one of the top ten series on Netflix. The poster prominently features the name of the film production company, adding to the excitement and anticipation for the movie. Denoting "Come and See Pictures Presents" (signifier) is a straightforward announcement that a movie production company called "Come and See Pictures" is presenting the movie (signified). The phrase "Come and See" carries connotations of a compelling invitation to behold something extraordinary and, perhaps, unsettling. This use of language suggests an intimate and direct engagement with the audience while hinting at the possibility of embarking on a captivating and mysterious journey into the unknown. The implied content of "Come and See Pictures Presents" will likely signify that the movie will offer a unique and possibly disturbing experience beyond ordinary storytelling, encouraging the viewer to prepare for an enlightening and powerful cinematic journey, thus setting the tone for the horror that follows.

Joko Anwar is a well-known filmmaker from Indonesia. He is recognized as a director, screenwriter, and producer. Some of his notable films include "*Pengabdi Setan*" (Satan's Slaves), a successful remake of a classic Indonesian horror movie from 1980. Another film, "*Perempuan Tanah Jahanam*" (Impetigore), was awarded Best Asian Film at the 2020 Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival in South Korea. *Siksa Kubur* is one of his works that is

phenomenal with 4 million viewers in cinema. The poster written "A Film by Joko Anwar" indicates that Joko Anwar is the movie's director, providing direct information about the film's authorship. The term has an additional connotative meaning, especially for those familiar with Joko Anwar's work. Since Anwar is known for his distinctive contributions to the horror genre, it promises quality, originality, and a specific stylistic approach.

The verbal sign "*Di Bioskop Lebaran 2024*" in the movie poster translates to "In Cinemas *Lebaran* 2024", indicating that the movie's release date coincides with *Lebaran* (Eid al-Fitr) in 2024. This expression has a deeper cultural and emotional meaning. *Lebaran* is an essential festive period in Indonesia, and it is associated with family gatherings, celebrations, and spiritual reflection. The connotative implication of releasing a horror film at such a festive time could create a stark contrast between the joyous occasion and the movie's dark themes, thereby intensifying the movie's impact. This aligns with Barthes' idea that connotation involves the socio-cultural and emotional associations of the sign. It suggests that the promise of a unique entertainment experience amid the festivities is a strategic move to attract large audiences on holiday.

The text at the bottom of the poster contains essential information about the movie contributors, including the director, producers, cast, crew, and production companies. This critical list recognizes the work and roles of the people making the movie. The placement and prominence of these credits convey additional meanings. The presence of well-known personalities like the renowned Indonesian actor Reza Rahardian and filmmaker Joko Anwar in a project is a powerful marketing tool. By leveraging the strong reputations of these individuals, companies can effectively attract audiences and generate interest in their offerings. This association with respected names enhances the promotional efforts and can significantly contribute to the visibility and success of the project.

The Analysis of Visual Signs

According to Chandler (2007), a visual sign is any image or visual element that conveys meaning within a specific cultural or communicative context. The visual of this poster, which focuses on the giant skull, refers to twelve wrapped corpses (*pocong*) arranged to form a

skull (signified). This explicit depiction immediately conveys a ghoulish and creepy image. In a connotative sense, the arrangement of *pocong* to create a skull evokes deeper cultural and psychological fears. Indonesian folklore is rich with tales of the *pocong*, a spectral figure believed to hold the lingering spirit of the departed. *Pocong*, a figure from Indonesian folklore, is a compelling example of the rich mythical traditions that exist in Indonesia. Folklore encompasses three primary categories: myths, legends, and fairy tales. Myths are narratives transmitted across generations and regarded as accounts of actual events (Nugraha et al., 2024). In Indonesian folklore, the *pocong* is one of the most terrifying supernatural creatures. It is believed to be the soul of a deceased person trapped in its shroud. The fear stems mainly from its creepy appearance. It is wrapped in white fabric, with its face partially visible, making a disturbing jumping motion. In Indonesian culture, the *pocong* is believed to haunt the living if certain funeral rituals are not properly completed. If the burial shroud (*kafan*) is not untied after 40 days, the deceased's spirit may remain bound and unable to move on, causing it to manifest as a *pocong*. This haunting is thought to be the spirit's way of seeking help to complete the necessary rites and find peace.

In some cultures, the skull is linked to the occult, the afterlife, or other supernatural elements. The underlying message conveyed by the *pocong* forming the image of a skull symbolizes the 12 distinct archetypes of individuals who will experience awakening after passing. Each of these 12 categories is depicted with unique expressions. By combining the culturally specific *pocong* with the universal symbol of death, the artwork intensifies the sense of horror. It suggests that unresolved terrors from the past are reemerging to haunt the present. The presence of a large and menacing snake wrapped around the skull gives a terrifying impression. In Islamic belief, this snake called Sajau Al-Aqra (also known as Al-Aqra) refers to a particular snake associated with the torment of the grave. According to HR. Bukhari in Aizid (2017: 20), the Prophet also said in a hadith about the snake of Shujau Agra: 'It has two fangs, then it wraps around the person's neck, then it takes the person with its two jawbones'. This snake is considered part of the punishment a sinful soul faces in the grave. The term comes from various Islamic traditions and hadiths that describe the punishments that await those who have not

fulfilled their religious duties while alive. The snake has a connotative meaning of danger, evil, and the supernatural, evoking fear and foreboding. The snake's association with danger and evil amplifies the horror elements of the narrative, setting the tone for the terrifying events that the audience can expect.

The use of black as a background colour in the poster denotes that black (signifier) is simply a choice of colour (signified) used as a background for the poster. In terms of connotation, black has a wide range of associations, especially in the context of a horror film. Based on Cerrato (2012: 15), black is a mysterious colour associated with fear and the unknown. The stark contrast between the black background and other visual elements on the poster also draws attention to critical features, creating a visually striking image that reinforces the themes of fear and the supernatural. The utilization of dark shades, complemented by accents of red and earthy nuances, effectively establishes an ambiance of trepidation and anticipation.

3.2 The Analysis of *Kuyang* Movie Poster



Figure 3.2 “Kuyang” Movie Poster

The Analysis of Verbal Sign

Verbal signs encompass spoken verbal messages delivered by the actor or narrator and also include signs communicated through written text (Damayanti et al., 2021). The phrase on the top of the poster serves as a powerful verbal sign in the “Kuyang” poster. The signifier here is “*Siang kau diburu, malam kau mangsa*,” which translates as “hunted by day, devoured by night.” Denoting a threat that exists both by day and by night. The signified is the constant danger faced

by the characters in the story. In connotative terms, the phrase evokes a sense of unrelenting fear and inescapable danger, suggesting that the threat is omnipresent and unyielding. It intensifies the horror by implying that there is no safe time for the characters, thereby heightening the tension for the audience.

Aenigma Picture, established by Yongki Ongestu in 2012, is known for producing high-quality animations, among other media forms. The top section of the poster prominently displays the name of the production company, ensuring that it is easily visible and recognizable. “*Aenigma Picture mempersembahkan*” translates as “Aenigma Picture presents”. Denotes that the movie is produced and presented by Aenigma Picture. This means a company has a role in bringing a film to an audience. This sentence connotatively refers to a certain level of quality and professionalism associated with Aenigma Picture, implying that the film has the backing of a reputable production house.

An intriguing verbal sign on the poster reads “*Diangkat dari novel horor viral karya Achmad Benbela*”, which translates as “Adapted from the viral horror novel by Achmad Benbela”. It denotes that the movie is based on a popular horror novel by Achmad Benbela. Achmad Benbela is known as one of the writers of horror stories on Twitter and various forums. Successfully publishing a horror book, *Kuyang*, another mystical story from Borneo to the public. Significantly, it refers to the origin of the source material and its wide popularity. The connotation conveys a sense of credibility and a pre-existing fan base, suggesting that the story has already captivated a large audience through its success as a novel. Highlighting the widespread popularity of the novel through social media and other online platforms generates anticipation and fosters trust among potential viewers.

Yongki Ongestu is an Indonesian director, screenwriter, cinematographer, and photographer. He founded Aenigma Pictures in 2012, producing commercials, music videos, animations, and short films. His notable works include the movie “*Tarian Lengger Maut*” (2021), a thriller that intertwines traditional dance with a mystery plot, while “*Kuyang*” (2024) is a horror film based on Indonesian folklore. On the poster, “*Sebuah film karya Yongki Ongestu*” refers to the director's authorship of the movie. In the given text, it is essential to remember the significance of the phrase “A film by Yongki Ongestu.”

Denotatively, this phrase serves to indicate the director of the movie. The concept of signifier and signified is an essential part of semiotics. The signifier refers to the actual phrase or word used, while the signified concept in this context is that Yongki Ongestu is the creative force behind the movie. When we consider the connotative sense, this phrase carries implications of credibility and artistry, hinting at the director's esteemed reputation or distinctive style. This can potentially appeal to viewers who are drawn to the work of experienced and talented directors, adding an extra layer of interest and significance to the movie.

The movie's title, “*Kuyang*,” displayed on the poster, directly alludes to a legendary figure from Indonesian folklore with specific roots in the region of Kalimantan. The “*Kuyang*” is described as a spectral being, typically manifesting as a floating female visage with trailing internal organs, and is steeped in associations with dark magic and fear-inducing phenomena. The meaning here is “*Kuyang*”, while the significance is the terrifying mythological creature that haunts the night. Symbolically, the title evokes a sense of fear, mystery, and cultural intrigue, tapping into the collective imagination and folklore knowledge of the audience. Using “*Kuyang*” as a title, the film promises to delve into local mythologies, offering a story that is not only terrifying but also rich in cultural context and meaning, attracting viewers fascinated by traditional horror stories and local legends.

At the bottom of the title, the phrase “*Sekutu iblis yang selalu mengintai*,” which translates as “The ally of the devil who is always lurking,” serves as a spooky verbal sign on the poster. Denoted as an entity in league with the devil, always watching or waiting to strike. The signifier embodies the phrase itself, while the signified encapsulates the existence of an evil, ever-watchful force. This phrase evokes a never-ending feeling of danger, indicating that the threat is not only potent but also ever-present and unavoidable. Its purpose is to instill a profound sense of fear and anticipation that lingers and affects the individual on a deep level.

The last verbal signs found are the release date and the list of actors. The phrase “*7 Maret 2024 di Bioskop*” can be translated denotatively as “7 March 2024, in cinemas”, which indicates the specific release date of the film. It creates a sense of anticipation and urgency for the audience to mark their calendars for the premiere.

The cast includes Dimas Aditya, Alyssa Abidin, Putri Ayudya, and Elly Luthan, informing the audience about the actors in the movie. The connotative purpose of including these familiar names is to attract their fan base by suggesting the film's quality and the actors' credibility in delivering strong performances.

The Analysis of Visual Sign

Filmmakers often rely on the use of visual imagery and design elements to craft compelling movie posters, as these promotional materials play a crucial role in generating interest in their films. Visual communication, through the use of graphics, photographs, and illustrations, is an effective means of conveying information to audiences. This mode of communication has a more immediate impact, as it allows viewers to process and interpret visual signals quickly, compared to reading through lengthy paragraphs of text (Pratiwi et al., 2022). In this modern era, movie posters use central images or characters that are iconic or representative of the movie's themes.

An image of a floating female figure with messy hair, blood, and exposed viscera, representing “*Kuyang*”, is iconic. Indicatively, it means a gross and frightening figure from Indonesian folklore, known for its horrible appearance and creepy nature. The signifier is the image itself, while the signified is the mythological creature “*Kuyang*” and its associated terror. Widespread fear of the *Kuyang* leads Indonesians, especially in Kalimantan, to take certain precautions. In some cultures, there is a belief that the *Kuyang* specifically targets pregnant women in order to gain power from their unborn babies. Because of this, pregnant women often resort to wearing protective amulets or placing talismans around their homes to keep the *Kuyang* at bay. These rituals reflect the deep-seated fears surrounding childbirth and the vulnerability of mothers and babies. They evoke a sense of fear, revulsion, and discomfort by tapping into primal fears of the supernatural and the disturbing.

The movie is set in a dark, forested village with wooden houses, which is depicted on the poster. The signifier is the image of the village itself, while the signified is the movie's setting, establishing a remote and possibly haunted locale. This indicates a remote and mysterious village, possibly Indonesian, surrounded by dense forest and filled with traditional wooden houses. The imagery conjures up feelings of

isolation, mystery, and an underlying sense of foreboding, suggesting that the village is where dark and supernatural events occur. The message conveyed by this visual is to establish the setting for a horror story deeply rooted in local folklore and tradition where the familiar becomes terrifying.

As a decisive element in conveying the movie's tone, the color used for the visual sign of the poster is dominated by dark tones with red highlights. Denotatively, the color scheme is dominated by shadows and deep tones, with bold accents of red. As Cerrato (2012: 4) noted, red is widely used as a sign of danger and blood. When considering connotation, it's important to note that dark tones have the ability to evoke feelings of fear, mystery, and the unknown. On the other hand, red accents typically signify blood, violence, and urgency. The combination of dark and red hues creates a compelling narrative filled with terror and suspense.

3.3 The Analysis of “*Badarawuhi*” Movie Poster



Figure 3.3 “*Badarawuhi*” Movie Poster

The Analysis of Verbal Sign

The title “*Badarawuhi di Desa Penari*” is a powerful verbal sign with multiple meanings. The signifier, “*Badarawuhi*”, refers to the specific name of a ghostly figure deeply rooted in Indonesian folklore and known for her traditional dance. The signified here is the haunting presence of a supernatural being associated with both beauty and danger. “*Di Desa Penari*” translates as “in the dancing village”, referring to the geographical setting of the story. According to Saussure's semiotic theory, the signifier is the form that the sign takes, and the signified is the

concept it represents (Chandler, 2007: 14). The denotative meaning of this title is straightforward: it suggests a narrative involving *Badarawuhi* in a village known for its dancers. Connotatively, the title evokes a mixture of cultural heritage and uncanny suspense. The village setting suggests a close-knit, possibly traditional community, while the association with dance suggests cultural practices intertwined with supernatural elements. Taken together, these elements create a sense of foreboding and mystery, suggesting that the ominous presence of the *Badarawuhi* overshadows the beauty and grace of the traditional dance. This duality of cultural richness and supernatural horror makes the title compelling and exciting for audiences.

MD Pictures is a famous movie production company in Indonesia, known for producing a wide range of popular movies in various genres. Founded by Manoj Punjabi, MD Pictures has established itself as a major player in the Indonesian movie industry. Some of their notable horror movies include “*Sewu Dino*”, “*Munkar*”, “*Kisah Tanah Jawa: Pocong Gundul*” and the “*Danur*” series. The placement of “MD Pictures Presents” on the poster has explicit and implicit meanings. The MD Pictures” signifier refers to the movie production company known for making and distributing movies. The signified is the authority and credibility of the company behind the movie. This phrase means that the movie is produced and presented by MD Pictures. However, because MD Pictures is likely to be recognized by audiences familiar with its previous work, the connotation suggests quality and professionalism. This phrase gives the viewer an expectation that the movie is of a certain standard and is backed by a reputable company, thereby increasing the appeal and credibility of the movie from the outset.

Simplemen, a popular Twitter writer from Indonesia, is known for his powerful and concise writing style. He has gained a significant following for his horror tweets. His tweets have been used in successful movies such as *KKN di Desa Penari* and *Sewu Dino*. The phrase “The Prequel to Simpleman’s *KKN di Desa Penari*” is a strong verbal signifier. The signifier “Simpleman’s *KKN di Desa Penari*” refers to a famous work by the writer Simpleman, known for his popular and chilling story about a group of university students doing community service (KKN) in the haunted village of *Penari*. The signified is a well-established horror story that has captivated many readers and viewers.

Denotes that the film is a precursor to the events described in Simpleman's well-known story. In a connotative sense, it creates excitement and curiosity among the audience, especially those familiar with Simpleman's previous work. It suggests that the movie will delve into the origins and background of the eerie events that unfolded in the original story, promising deeper insights and more thrills. This connection to a widely recognized and successful narrative attracts fans of the original story and sets expectations for a high-quality and engaging continuation of the horror legend.

Manoj Punjabi, the CEO of MD Pictures, is a renowned Indonesian film producer known for his significant contributions to the industry. His notable works include the horror hits “*KKN di Desa Penari*” (2022) and “*Sewu Dino*” (2023), both based on viral stories by Simplemen. Manoj also produced the acclaimed romantic drama “*Ayat-Ayat Cinta*” (2008), the biographical film “*Habibie & Ainun*” (2012), and the popular horror film “*Danur*” (2017), which led to several sequels. The phrase “A Manoj Punjabi Production” is a verbal sign with a significant meaning. The signifier, “A Manoj Punjabi Production”, directly refers to the renowned film producer and his role in making the film. The signified is the assurance of quality and expertise associated with Punjabi's extensive experience and success in the film industry. The denotation means that the movie has been produced under the guidance and supervision of Manoj Punjabi and the connotation implies a high standard of filmmaking, creativity, and professionalism, as Manoj Punjabi is known for his successful and high-quality productions.

The phrase “A film by Kimo Stamboel” is a compelling verbal sign. The signifier “A film by Kimo Stamboel” points directly to the director, Kimo Stamboel, known for his horror genre work. His directorial debut, *Bunian*, came out in 2004, and his slasher hit, *Macabre* (aka *Rumah Dara*), came out in 2009, bringing him mainstream success. The signified is the expectation of a certain style and quality of filmmaking that fans associate with his name. In a denotative sense, the phrase means that Kimo Stamboel has directed the film. The connotation is one of anticipation and intrigue, as viewers familiar with Stamboel's work might expect a film that is intense, well-crafted, and creatively directed. This association promises a certain level of artistry and expertise, adding to the film's appeal. The phrase acts as a seal of quality,

suggesting that viewers are in for a cinematic experience that reflects Stamboel's unique vision and talent in the horror genre.

The phrase "*Lebaran 2024*" is a verbal sign of the date of remembrance on the movie's poster. The signifier "*Lebaran 2024*" refers to the major Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan in the year 2024. The signified is the specific time frame in which the film will be released, aligning it with an important cultural and religious celebration. In a denotative sense, the phrase indicates that the film will be premiered during the *Lebaran* celebrations in the year 2024. The connotation of festivity, family reunions, and holiday spirit suggests that the film is positioned as a major entertainment event for this special time. Releasing a film during *Lebaran* implies an expectation of a large audience, as people often seek entertainment and leisure activities during the holiday season. This strategic timing increases the potential appeal and visibility of the film and promises a celebratory and communal viewing experience.

The credits displayed at the foot of the poster proffer indispensable details regarding the production and distribution of the cinematic work entitled "*Badarawuhi di Desa Penari*." The presence of the MD Pictures logo and the mention of "A Manoj Punjabi Production" indicate the primary production company and the producer, respectively. Both are well-regarded in the Indonesian film industry, which suggests high production values and a wide distribution network. The technical credits, which include the roles of director, screenwriter, and cinematographer, emphasize the collaborative effort and professional quality behind the film, thereby reassuring the audience of its caliber. The listing of actor names, such as Aulia Sarah, Maudy Effrosina, and Jourdy Pranata, indicates the audience's enthusiasm for the film. Including logos from companies like Dolby Digital implies superior technical quality, promising an excellent viewing experience with advanced sound and visual effects. Social media handles and website information also invite viewers to engage with the film's promotional content online, fostering community interaction and informing audiences about updates and events.

The Analysis of Visual Sign

The central image of a woman in traditional dress serves as a powerful visual signifier. It is an image of a woman dressed in elaborate and culturally significant garments that are instantly

identified as traditional Indonesian dress. According to Pratiwi et al. (2023), analysis of visual communication should consider the cultural meanings and values that shape the creation and reception of these images. The signified is *Badarawuhi*, a character deeply rooted in Indonesian folklore, known for her ghostly and enchanting presence as a traditional dancer. This visual element denotes cultural and historical richness and represents a woman in traditional dress. The connotation is mystical and ominous, suggesting the supernatural and the cultural significance of the *Badarawuhi*. The traditional dress reinforces the character's authenticity and cultural depth, while her central placement in the image signifies her importance in the narrative. This visual sign is a combination of cultural heritage and an uncanny sense of suspense that draws the viewer into the haunting and captivating world of the film.

A striking visual sign is provided by the seven ghostly figures surrounding the central woman, who are veiled and appear to be floating or submerged in water. These ghostly forms, ethereal and otherworldly, starkly contrast traditional clothing. Signified is the presence of supernatural entities or spirits, adding a layer of horror and mystery. Denotatively, this image depicts veiled figures that seem to defy the laws of nature, either floating or submerged, adding to the eerie atmosphere. Connotatively, suggesting the pervasive influence of the supernatural in the story, these figures evoke a sense of fear and the unknown. Hinting at secrets and dangers lurking beneath the surface, the watery setting implies a connection to the mystical and submerged. This visual sign reinforces the film's themes of haunting and cultural mysticism, creating a chilling and immersive experience for the viewer.

In the distance, a cave emerges from the shadows, its entrance partially obscured by the rippling reflection of water. The dim light casts a mysterious glow, highlighting the rugged textures of the cave walls and creating an atmosphere of intrigue and seclusion. The tranquil surface of the water adds an element of serenity to the otherwise eerie scene, inviting curiosity about what lies beyond in the hidden depths of the cave. The signified is the setting of a hidden, mysterious, and possibly dangerous place, which reinforces the horror elements of the narrative. It represents a cave environment characterized by darkness and water, which suggests isolation and hiding. In terms of connotation, the cavern evokes a sense of

ominousness and the unknown. The dim lighting further heightens the mystery and danger lurking in the shadows. The setting heightens tension and anticipation, drawing the viewer into a world where the environment itself is a character integral to the film's haunting and mysterious atmosphere.

The “*Badarawuhi di Desa Penari*” poster uses a color palette characterized by a prevalence of dark and ominous hues, with black, grey, and muted tones representing the dominant shades. The denotative meaning of these colors (the signifier) is their literal presence on the poster, which establishes a somber and eerie mood. The use of black and grey tones signifies darkness, mystery, and the supernatural, aligning with the horror genre and suggesting a narrative imbued with suspense and fear. According to Pratiwi et al. (2024), black is commonly linked with seriousness, fear, and danger. In terms of connotations, these colors evoke dread and anticipation, indicating the presence of dangerous and haunted elements within the film. The central figure is illuminated to a greater extent than the surrounding characters, thereby drawing the viewer's focus and indicating her importance and malevolent nature.

3.4 The Analysis of “*Sinden Gaib*” Movie Poster



Figure 3.4 “*Sinden Gaib*” Movie Poster

The Analysis of Verbal Sign

In the “*Sinden Gaib*” movie poster, the verbal sign “*Sinden Gaib*,” which is the title of the movie, serves as both a signifier and signified, offering rich layers of meaning. A *Sinden* is a traditional Javanese female singer in Indonesia, best known for her role in accompanying

gamelan orchestras and wayang performances (traditional Javanese puppet shows). *Sinden* sings classical Javanese songs known as tembang, which are characterized by their intricate melodies and poetic lyrics. *Sinden* denotes a traditional Javanese female singer, while ‘gaib’ means supernatural or invisible. Together, they refer to a supernatural singer. In a connotative sense, the term evokes a sense of uncanny mystery and cultural depth. “*Sinden*” conjures images of traditional performances and cultural heritage, while “gaib” brings in elements of the supernatural and the unknown, suggesting haunting, possession, or otherworldly experiences. This interplay of tradition and the supernatural suggests a plot that interweaves cultural elements with ghostly or mystical phenomena, drawing the audience into a narrative rich in both cultural significance and creepy sense.

Starvision, officially known as Starvision Plus, is a well-known production company in Indonesia. It is known for producing many popular films and television shows that have received both critical acclaim and commercial success. In the phrase “*Starvision mempersembahkan*” on the poster, the signifier is the text itself, while the signified is the concept it conveys. Denotatively, the phrase means “Starvision presents”, indicating that Starvision is the production company behind the film. The phrase implies professionalism and quality, as Starvision is well-known in the Indonesian film industry. The use of “*mempersembahkan*” (presents) suggests a formal and grand introduction, creating a sense of anticipation and excitement in the audience. It signals that the film is backed by an established entity, promising a certain production value and entertainment quality standard. This combination of denotation and connotation creates the expectation that ‘*Sinden Gaib*’ is a significant release worthy of attention.

In the phrase “*Diangkat Dari Kisah Nyata*” translated as “Based on a true story” on the film poster, the signifier is the text itself, while the signified is the idea it conveys. This means that the plot of the movie is based on actual events. It has a strong connotation of authenticity and real terror, which often increases the fear factor for the audience. Emphasizing that the story is rooted in reality creates interest and adds a layer of credibility and relatability, making the horror more intense. This interplay between the literal meaning and its deeper implications effectively

enhances the movie's appeal. It promises the audience a horror experience that is rooted in real-life events.

Faozan Rizal is an Indonesian cinematographer and film director. His name began to be recognized in the Indonesian film industry when he directed the film *Habibie & Ainun*. The phrase “*Sebuah film karya Faozan Rizal*” on the poster, which contains a signifier, is the text itself, while the signifier is the idea that Faozan Rizal created the movie. The denotative meaning is “A film by Faozan Rizal”, indicating that Faozan Rizal is the film's director. In a connotative sense, the sentence carries the weight of the director's reputation and artistic vision. For those familiar with Faozan Rizal's work, it suggests a certain level of quality and stylistic approach, potentially attracting his fans and signaling to new viewers that a recognized filmmaker has made the film. This verbal sign not only credits the director but also subtly assures the audience of the film's creative pedigree, increasing its appeal and setting expectations for its cinematic style and storytelling quality.

One of the most common verbal signs found on movie posters is the film's release date in the form of a date, a month, and a year. The verbal sign “*Februari 2024 di bioskop*” signifies the release date and location of the film's premiere. In other words, the film will be available to watch in theatres in February 2024. The phrase connotatively evokes anticipation and excitement, suggesting that existing fans of the genre and potential new viewers should look forward to the forthcoming release. The signifier is the phrase itself, while the signified is the specific time and place for the film's release. An underlying message is that the film is worthy of being marked on calendars and prepared for in advance, thus creating a heightened sense of exclusivity around the debut of this film.

Listing actor names, such as Sara Fajira, Riza Syah, Dimas Aditya, Naufal Samudra, and Arla Ailani, serve two distinct purposes. In a denotative sense, the list of names provides information about the cast and key crew members involved in the film, indicating which actors and other personnel the audience can expect to see and the talents behind the production. The list of names is a signifier, indicating the individuals contributing to the film. As a signified, it conveys recognition and credibility, suggesting the involvement of prominent actors and enhancing the film's appeal. The list also implies a promise of quality and a skilled, potentially well-known

team behind the film, which can heighten audience interest and expectations.

The verbal sign displayed at the bottom of the poster, which features the logos of Starvision, Evergreen Pictures, and various social media handles, can be understood to convey both denotative and connotative meanings. In a denotative sense, the logos and handles provide clear information about the production companies involved in the film and where further information can be found online. The signifier is the presence of the aforementioned logos and text, while the signified is the production backing and the availability of further details on social media. In terms of connotation, these elements convey credibility, professionalism, and accessibility. This reassures the audience that well-established entities support the film and that it can be readily located on social media platforms. The implicit message is to inspire confidence in the audience regarding the film's quality and motivate them to engage with the promotional content online, generating enthusiasm and building a community of interested viewers before the film is released.

The Analysis of Visual Sign

The visual representation of a woman with white, ghostly eyes on the poster can be interpreted in multiple ways, each with a distinct layer of meaning. In terms of denotation, the image portrays a woman with eyes that appear unnatural, thereby suggesting that she may be possessed or otherwise be a supernatural being. In Indonesian culture, the concept of possession is frequently interpreted through the lens of traditional beliefs and folklore, wherein it is commonly attributed to the influence of spirits, ghosts, or supernatural beings that are believed to inhabit a person's body. The signifier is the woman's eerie eyes, and the signified is the notion of possession or ghostliness. Connotatively, the image evokes feelings of fear and curiosity, indicating to the audience that the film will explore the paranormal and unsettling realms. The image prepares viewers for a frightening experience, suggesting the presence of supernatural elements that will drive the horror narrative, thus enticing horror enthusiasts to watch the film.

The image of a ghost in traditional Javanese attire, potentially a *sinden* or dancer, conveys a wealth of symbolic meanings. According to Febriansyah et al., (2022), *sinden* is a designation for a singing woman accompanying

music gamelan orchestra. In terms of denotation, the image depicts an individual attired in traditional attire engaged in either a cultural dance or vocal performance. The signifier is the traditional dress and posture, while the signified is the Javanese cultural heritage and performing arts. In connotative terms, this visual representation conjures up an ambiance of mystery and depth. It bridges the gap between the supernatural elements of the film and the rich tapestry of Indonesian cultural traditions and folklore. The hidden message embedded in this visual signifier is that the film will interweave eerie supernatural occurrences with these traditional practices, suggesting that the source of the horror may be rooted in these practices. This sets the stage for a culturally rich narrative transcending generic horror conventions, offering the audience a unique and immersive experience.

The dark colour palette, comprising shades of blue, grey, and black, serves both denotative and connotative purposes. The colour black is typically associated with negative connotations, as evidenced by the use of the term 'blacklist', the concept of 'black humour', and the 'black death' (Cerrato, 2012: 15). In terms of denotation, these colours visually indicate a gloomy and ominous atmosphere, thereby establishing the mood typically associated with the horror genre. The signifier utilizes these particular colors, and the signified is the sensation of darkness, mystery, and fear. The use of this color palette also evokes connotations of dread and suspense, which serve to prepare the audience for the supernatural elements within the film. The hidden message behind the visual sign is to prepare the audience for a chilling experience filled with eerie and haunting moments.

IV. CONCLUSION

Analyzing semiotic elements in Indonesian horror movie posters provides valuable insights into how visual and verbal signs shape audience expectations and reinforce genre conventions. The use of specific titles, taglines, imagery, and color schemes not only attracts potential viewers but also conveys deeper cultural and thematic messages, such as a fascination with the mystical and the supernatural. These elements set the stage for a suspenseful, fear-inducing experience central to the horror genre. Including culturally specific symbols, like the *pocong* or *Kuyang*, caters to local audiences familiar with these myths while also introducing international

viewers to unique aspects of Indonesian culture. This semiotic approach can be extended beyond horror, offering a framework for analyzing other genres and cultural contexts, thereby enhancing our understanding of global cinematic expressions and cultural narratives.

The findings suggest that future research could investigate how the use of signs and symbols varies across different cultures, particularly in the context of horror movie posters. By comparing Indonesian horror movie posters with those from other countries, researchers could uncover similarities and differences in how fear and the supernatural are represented in different societies. Understanding how elements such as color schemes, visual symbols, and language provoke specific emotions and resonate with different cultures can help marketers and designers create more targeted and effective promotional materials for films of any genre. Furthermore, studying the changes in semiotic elements in Indonesian horror posters over time could provide insights into how genre conventions and audience expectations have evolved.

The analysis found that movie posters use dark colors, scary images, and powerful taglines to create fear and anticipation. For example, the posters for *Badarawuhi* and *Sinden Gaib* effectively use these elements to show torment and mythological horror. These findings show how important it is to study signs and symbols to understand how movie posters communicate complex cultural and genre-specific messages. The study connects these specific observations to the broader themes of Indonesian horror and global cinema and highlights how signs and symbols shape how viewers see movies.

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