

The Meaning of Myths in Javanese Culture in Indonesian Horror Films

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ABSTRACT

Horror films often serve as a medium to convey information and depict stories rooted in oral traditions and local myths, particularly drawing from Javanese mythology. Filmmakers create films with the aim of entertaining while conveying underlying meanings. This study explores the significance of using myths in Indonesian horror films, questioning whether it reflects the preservation of cultural heritage, revives oral traditions, and provides a distinct Indonesian identity in global cinema. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the meaning of myths in the creation of myth, Javanese culture, film. Indonesian horror films and offers new insights into how cultural heritage can be translated into visual entertainment. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of films as a platform for strengthening cultural identity. This study aims to describe the meaning of Javanese myths in Indonesian horror films using a qualitative descriptive approach. Data collection techniques involve literature reviews. The research aims to explore data through books, scholarly works, and relevant journal articles on the topic. The findings indicate that the use of Javanese myths in Indonesian horror films is not only intended to create tension or fear but also to convey cultural messages embedded in those mythologies. Javanese myths serve as a means to preserve and introduce the values, beliefs, and traditions of the Javanese society to the audience, especially the younger generation.

Keywords: *Mythology, Javanese Culture, Indonesian Horror Films*

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Endonezya Korku Filmlerinde Cava Kùltüründeki Mitlerin Anlamı

ÖZET

Korku filmleri, genellikle sözlü geleneklere ve yerel mitlere dayanan hikâyeleri aktarmak ve bilgi iletmek için bir araç görevi görür; özellikle Cava mitolojisinden beslenir. Film yapımcıları, hem eğlendirmek hem de derin anlamlar iletmek amacıyla filmler üretirler. Bu çalışma, Endonezya korku filmlerinde mitlerin kullanımının önemini incelemekte ve bunun kültürel mirasın korunmasını mı yansıttığını, sözlü gelenekleri yeniden canlandırıp canlandırmadığını ve küresel sinemada özgün bir Endonezya kimliği sağlayıp sağlamadığını sorgulamaktadır. Araştırma, Endonezya korku filmlerinin yaratımında mitlerin anlamına dair daha derin bir anlayışa katkıda bulunmakta ve kültürel mirasın görsel eğlenceye nasıl dönüştürülebileceğine ilişkin yeni bakış açıları sunmaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma filmlerin kültürel kimliğin güçlendirilmesi için bir platform olarak önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, nitel tanımlayıcı bir yaklaşım kullanarak Endonezya korku filmlerinde Cava mitlerinin anlamını açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Veri toplama teknikleri literatür taramasını içermektedir. Araştırma, konuyla ilgili kitaplar, akademik çalışmalar ve bilimsel makaleler aracılığıyla verileri incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bulgular, Endonezya korku filmlerinde Cava mitlerinin kullanılmasının yalnızca gerilim veya korku yaratmak amacıyla değil, aynı zamanda bu mitolojilerde yer alan kültürel mesajları iletmek için de yapıldığını göstermektedir. Cava mitleri, Cava toplumunun değerlerini, inançlarını ve geleneklerini özellikle genç kuşaklara tanıtmak ve korumak için bir araç görevi görmektedir.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mitoloji, Cava Kùltürü, Endonezya Korku Filmleri,*

INTRODUCTION

Horror films remain one of the most popular genres in Indonesian cinema and continue to dominate the national film industry (Fajar & Lestari, 2021). Beyond entertainment, Indonesian horror films frequently incorporate local myths, supernatural beliefs, folklore, and traditional rituals that reflect the cultural identity of Indonesian society (Akbar, 2022). In particular, Javanese mythology has become a significant cultural source in contemporary horror cinema, where mystical narratives and spiritual entities are represented through visual storytelling and cinematic symbolism.

Javanese culture was selected as the focus of this study because it is one of the most dominant cultural sources represented in Indonesian horror cinema. Many Indonesian horror films adopt Javanese myths, rituals, mystical beliefs, and supernatural symbols as central narrative elements (Esfandari, 2016). Ritual practices such as *Sesajen*, beliefs in ancestral spirits, sacred heirlooms, mystical songs, and supernatural entities frequently appear in horror films and are strongly associated with Javanese cultural identity. In addition, Javanese mythology has long been recognized as closely connected to spirituality, mysticism, and supernatural traditions that continue to influence Indonesian popular culture. As a result, Javanese myths become important cultural symbols through which Indonesian horror films construct fear, suspense, and mystical imagination for audiences.

Myths are cultural narratives that convey values, beliefs, and collective meanings within a society. Roland Barthes conceptualized myth as a system of communication that constructs ideological meaning through signs and symbols, while Joseph Campbell viewed myth as a narrative containing moral and spiritual significance for a community (Nastiti, 2023). In Javanese culture, myths are closely associated with spiritual beliefs, rituals, and the relationship between humans and the supernatural world. These beliefs continue to persist in modern society and are transmitted through oral traditions, traditional performances, and contemporary media such as film (Herusatoto, 2018).

The persistence of mythological beliefs in Indonesian society has encouraged filmmakers to reinterpret traditional myths into modern cinematic narratives. Horror films often portray sacred rituals, supernatural beings, and mystical practices derived from Javanese culture to create fear and suspense while simultaneously representing cultural identity. However, these representations are not culturally neutral. Film, as a form of mass media, has the power to shape audience perceptions and reconstruct cultural meanings. The representation of Javanese myths in horror cinema may preserve cultural memory, but it may also simplify, stereotype, or commodify cultural beliefs for commercial purposes.

Previous studies have examined Javanese mythology in literature, traditional rituals, and folklore traditions Istibillah et al., (2021) and other studies have discussed the popularity of myth-based horror films in Indonesia. However, limited research specifically analyzes how Indonesian horror films construct and communicate the cultural meaning of Javanese myths through cinematic representation. In addition, studies focusing on the symbolic representation of myth in contemporary Indonesian horror cinema remain relatively limited.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how Javanese myths are represented and interpreted in Indonesian horror films. Through a literature review approach, this research analyzes patterns of myth representation, cultural symbolism, and the communication of Javanese cultural values in horror cinema. This study contributes to the discussion of cultural representation in Indonesian film by highlighting how horror cinema reconstructs mythological narratives within contemporary popular culture.

Although previous studies have discussed myths in particular Indonesian horror films, most research focuses only on specific narratives, rituals, or individual cultural symbols. Limited studies comprehensively examine how Javanese myths are represented and reconstructed across Indonesian horror cinema from a cultural representation perspective. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of Javanese myths in Indonesian horror films through a literature review approach by identifying recurring themes, symbolic meanings, and cultural patterns found in previous studies.

This study contributes to the fields of cultural studies, communication studies, and film studies by providing a broader understanding of how Indonesian horror cinema reconstructs Javanese mythology into contemporary visual narratives. In addition, the study explains how horror films simultaneously function as media for cultural preservation and commercial entertainment through the representation of mysticism, spirituality, and supernatural beliefs in popular culture.

Methods

Literature Study

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a literature review method (library research). Literature review research is conducted through the systematic collection, evaluation, and interpretation of scholarly sources relevant to a particular topic in order to develop conceptual understanding and identify patterns within previous studies (Ridwan et al., 2021). This method was selected because the research focuses on examining the representation of Javanese myths and cultural values in Indonesian horror films through existing academic discussions, journal articles, books, and previous research findings rather than

through field observation or audience interviews. The data sources in this study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, research reports, and academic publications discussing mythology, Javanese culture, cultural representation, and Indonesian horror cinema. The literature reviewed includes studies related to Indonesian horror films such as *KKN di Desa Penari*, *Mangkujiwo*, and *Malam Satu Suro*, which prominently portray elements of Javanese mythology, mysticism, and traditional belief systems.

Descriptive qualitative research aims to provide interpretative explanations of social and cultural phenomena in narrative form rather than statistical measurement (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2022). In this study, the qualitative approach is used to describe and interpret how myths, rituals, and spiritual beliefs are represented within Indonesian horror films. The analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes, symbolic meanings, and cultural values found in previous scholarly discussions concerning mythological representation in horror cinema.

The research process began with collecting relevant literature discussing Javanese myths, Indonesian horror films, and cultural representation. After the data were gathered, the researcher conducted data reduction and classification by selecting sources that were directly related to the research objectives. The selected literature was then categorized thematically based on recurring discussions concerning myth, mysticism, ritual practices, supernatural symbols, and cultural teachings in Indonesian horror films. The stages of analysis were adapted from the literature review framework proposed by Darmalaksana (2020), including data collection, data organization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing.

To strengthen the analytical framework, this study also adopts Roland Barthes' concept of myth as a cultural system of meaning. Barthes explains that myth functions as a form of representation that transforms cultural signs into ideological meanings. Through this perspective, the study interprets how myths in Indonesian horror films are represented not merely as supernatural stories, but also as cultural symbols associated with spirituality, morality, mysticism, and Javanese identity. This theoretical perspective helps explain how horror cinema reconstructs traditional beliefs into contemporary visual narratives within popular culture. The analysis was conducted through interpretative reading and comparative examination of previous studies to identify patterns in the representation of Javanese mythology in Indonesian horror cinema. Particular attention was given to how myths such as *Sesajen*, *Ayam Cemani*, *Celeng Ludro*, *Pengilon Kembar*, and *Malam Satu Suro* are represented as symbols of fear, spirituality, and supernatural power. Furthermore, the study examines how these mythological representations contribute to shaping audience perceptions of Javanese culture in contemporary media.

FINDINGS

The Nature of Local Myths

Local myths within Indonesian society are characterized by dual elements Tremendum (the frightening or awe-inspiring) and Fascinossum (the fascinating or spiritually moving). These two dimensions coexist to evoke both fear and reverence within the collective imagination of the people. According to Kurniawan & Santabudi (2023) citing Subagya, mythological belief is deeply connected to faith in supernatural events, sacred places, and mystical beings endowed with extraordinary spiritual power. Such beliefs often create a sense of sacredness (Keramat) and mystery (Angker), forming the foundation of many Indonesian cultural expressions, including film narratives.

The Moral Meaning of Myths

Horror films that incorporate local culture—such as traditional rituals, customs, and ancestral wisdom—play a significant role in preserving indigenous values. Ihsana & Urfan (2024) examined one such example in their study of the film *Primbon* (2023), an 88-minute feature set in an abandoned house in Klaten, Central Java, which had been uninhabited for twelve years. Directed by Rudi Soejarwo and produced by Yoen K., the film follows the story of Rana (played by Flavio Zaviera), a young woman who mysteriously disappears during a mountain hike with her friend Janu (played by Chicco Kurniawan). Although Janu eventually finds his way home, Rana never returns and is declared missing.

Beyond its supernatural narrative, *Primbon* delivers a profound moral message emphasizing the importance of obedience to parental advice. The film illustrates that disregarding such wisdom can lead to unrest or even disastrous consequences. It also invites audiences to reflect on the richness of local wisdom, ancestral knowledge, and the Javanese way of life. These themes highlight the enduring cultural relevance of myth and tradition in shaping moral consciousness within society.

» Ritual Cleansing and the Meaning of Ruwatan

One of the key mythological representations in *Primbon* centers on the ritual of self-purification known as Ruwatan. In Javanese tradition, Ruwatan is a sacred ceremony performed to release a person from curses or misfortunes believed to bring danger to themselves or their community (Ihsana & Urfan, 2024). The ritual symbolizes spiritual renewal and the restoration of harmony between humans and the unseen world. As (Wardani, 2020) explains, the ultimate purpose of Ruwatan is to cleanse individuals from Sukerta, a condition of impurity or misfortune and protect them from ill fate.



Figure 1. Ritual cleansing (*Ruwatan*) scene in the film *Primbon*

In Javanese society, *Ruwatan* ceremonies are often accompanied by traditional *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppet) performances. The play most frequently performed in these contexts is *Murwakala*, which tells the story of *Batara Kala*, a mythical giant associated with misfortune. *Wayang* performances have long been an integral part of Javanese cultural life, serving not only as artistic entertainment but also as a spiritual medium in ritual practices. Susanti & Lestari (2020) note, *Wayang* holds historical and symbolic significance as a means of seeking protection from life's uncertainties and maintaining social balance during *Ruwatan* ceremonies.

Through its portrayal of *Ruwatan*, *Primbon* reflects the coexistence of fear and reverence within Javanese spirituality capturing how myth continues to influence human behavior, moral decision-making, and belief systems in modern Indonesia.

» **Myth and Mysticism in Film *KKN di Desa Penari***

Another widely recognized example of myth representation in Indonesian horror cinema is *KKN di Desa Penari*, analyzed by Anisya et al (2023). Released in 2022 and adapted from the viral “simple man” story shared on social media in 2019, the film portrays the supernatural experiences of six university students undertaking their community service program (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata* or *KKN*) in a remote village. Throughout the narrative, the students encounter a series of mysterious events connected to local spiritual beliefs and supernatural forces. The film not only functions as a horror narrative but also reconstructs Javanese mythology through cinematic representation, emphasizing the relationship between humans, spirituality, and unseen entities within Javanese culture.

One of the most significant mythological elements represented in the film is the ritual practice of *Sesajen* (offerings). Various scenes depict *Sesajen* being placed in certain locations around the village as symbolic acts intended to maintain harmony between humans and supernatural beings. In Javanese culture, *Sesajen* carries not only spiritual meaning but also moral and social significance.

Offerings are traditionally dedicated to ancestral spirits, deities, or supernatural forces believed to influence human life (Gazali et al., 2023). Through these representations, the film portrays Sesajen as an important cultural practice rooted in respect, balance, and spiritual obedience.



Figure 2. Scene film KKN di Desa Penari (2022)

The depiction of Sesajen in the film also reflects the continuing influence of mythological belief systems within Javanese society. Sesajen functions as a medium through which individuals express reverence toward unseen spiritual powers that are believed to shape everyday life (Malik, 2023). In mythological contexts, offerings symbolize communication between the human and spiritual worlds, representing continuity between the living and ancestral spirits. As Sukmawan et al (2023) explain, Sesajen serves as a symbolic bridge connecting humans with supernatural entities. Through cinematic visualization, however, the film transforms this sacred cultural ritual into a source of fear, tension, and supernatural suspense. This representation demonstrates how Indonesian horror films reconstruct traditional rituals into visual symbols associated with mystery and danger.



Figure 3. Sesajen in the film KKN di Desa Penari (2022)

From Barthes' perspective, myth operates not only as a cultural narrative but also as a system of signs that produces ideological meaning. In *KKN di Desa Penari*, *Sesajen* is represented as a mystical object closely associated with supernatural terror and spiritual punishment. The film therefore positions Javanese spiritual practices within a horror framework that naturalizes the association between local culture and mysticism. Although the film contributes to preserving cultural narratives, it simultaneously commodifies sacred rituals by transforming them into entertainment-oriented horror aesthetics for mass audiences.

Another form of mythological practice depicted in the film is the myth of *Ayam Cemani*, a black chicken widely associated with mystical beliefs in several regions of Java. Known for its entirely black feathers, skin, and internal organs, *Ayam Cemani* is believed to possess supernatural power capable of providing protection, prosperity, and spiritual strength (Malik, 2023). Within Javanese mythology, the ritual sacrifice of *Ayam Cemani* is often understood as an attempt to maintain spiritual balance and avoid misfortune or malevolent forces (Chrisnanti & Sa'idah, 2023).

The representation of *Ayam Cemani* in the film strengthens the atmosphere of fear and mystical danger while simultaneously reinforcing the image of Javanese culture as deeply connected to supernaturalism. The use of culturally familiar mythological symbols creates narrative authenticity and emotional engagement for audiences because such myths remain recognizable within Indonesian society. At the same time, the repeated portrayal of Javanese traditions through occult and mystical imagery may contribute to cultural stereotyping in popular media. Javanese culture becomes predominantly associated with horror, magic, and

supernatural fear, rather than being represented through its broader philosophical and social values.

Through these depictions, *KKN di Desa Penari* demonstrates how Indonesian horror cinema reconstructs mythology into contemporary visual narratives that function both as cultural representation and commercial entertainment. Myths, rituals, and spiritual beliefs are transformed into cinematic symbols that preserve elements of cultural memory while simultaneously adapting them into marketable horror spectacles. This indicates that horror films play a significant role in shaping audience perceptions of Javanese culture by framing mythology as both a cultural identity and a source of supernatural fear within contemporary popular culture.

» **Myth of Celeng Ludro**

Mythological motifs are also prominently represented in the Indonesian horror film *Mangkujiwo*, as discussed by Kurniawan & Santabudi (2023)). The film incorporates several Javanese myths, including Celeng Ludro, Pengilon Kembar (twin mirrors), and Tembang Lingsir, which function as central symbols of fear, curse, and supernatural power throughout the narrative. The story revolves around a young pregnant woman who is believed by village elders to be cursed and mentally unstable. Influenced by local superstition and mystical beliefs, the woman becomes marginalized, imprisoned, and subjected to ritual practices associated with supernatural forces. Through this narrative, the film portrays how mythological beliefs continue to influence social behavior, collective fear, and systems of authority within Javanese society.



Figure 4. Poster of the horror film *Mangkujiwo* (2020)

One of the most dominant myths represented in the film is Celeng Ludro, a mystical wild boar associated with chaos, destruction, and spiritual imbalance. Within Javanese belief, Celeng Ludro symbolizes the presence of malevolent supernatural forces capable of bringing misfortune and social disorder (Kurniawan & Santabudi, 2023b). The term celeng refers to a wild boar, an untamed and aggressive animal, while ludro in Javanese culture refers to unruly or destructive behavior (Reno, 2020). Symbolically, the myth functions as a cultural warning against arrogance, greed, moral corruption, and the abuse of power.

The representation of Celeng Ludro in *Mangkujiwo* demonstrates how myth operates not only as folklore but also as a moral and ideological narrative within Javanese culture. The myth reflects the belief that imbalance between humans, nature, and spirituality may lead to disaster or supernatural punishment. Through cinematic representation, the film transforms Celeng Ludro into a visual symbol of fear and spiritual terror while simultaneously communicating ethical values concerning respect for nature and social harmony. This depiction suggests that mythology in Indonesian horror cinema often serves a dual function preserving traditional moral teachings while creating suspense and horror aesthetics for audiences.

From Barthes' perspective, myth functions as a cultural sign that naturalizes specific meanings and ideologies within society. In *Mangkujiwo*, Celeng Ludro is represented as a supernatural entity associated with danger and destruction, reinforcing the perception of Javanese mysticism as deeply connected to fear and the occult. The film therefore reconstructs traditional mythology into a cinematic spectacle that both preserves cultural memory and commodifies mystical belief for entertainment purposes. Through this representation, horror cinema positions myth as an accessible visual language capable of evoking emotional tension while simultaneously shaping audience perceptions of Javanese culture.

Another important mythological symbol depicted in the film is Pengilon Kembar (twin mirrors). In *Mangkujiwo*, Pengilon Kembar refers to sacred heirlooms (Pusaka) believed to contain mystical energy and supernatural power. These objects are portrayed as spiritually dangerous and therefore must not be used carelessly (Kurniawan & Santabudi, 2023). Within Javanese belief systems, heirlooms are often associated with ancestral spirits, authority, protection, and spiritual legitimacy. The myth surrounding sacred heirlooms reflects the belief that certain objects possess supernatural capabilities capable of influencing human destiny and social power.

The representation of Pengilon Kembar reinforces the cultural perception that mystical heirlooms function as symbols of authority and sacred power within

Javanese society. As explained by Hapsari (2024), heirlooms contribute to the collective imagination surrounding leadership, spirituality, and supernatural legitimacy in Javanese culture. Through cinematic representation, Mangkujiwo transforms these sacred objects into visual symbols of mystery and terror, emphasizing the connection between power and mysticism in horror narratives. This depiction illustrates how Indonesian horror films utilize traditional symbols to construct suspense while simultaneously preserving elements of cultural identity and ancestral belief.

Overall, the representation of Celeng Ludro, Pengilon Kembar, and other mythological symbols in Indonesian horror films demonstrates that mythology continues to function as an important cultural framework within contemporary cinema. Horror films reconstruct myths into visual narratives that simultaneously preserve spiritual beliefs, communicate moral messages, and commodify mysticism as popular entertainment. These representations indicate that Indonesian horror cinema plays a significant role in shaping audience understanding of Javanese culture by associating mythology with fear, spirituality, authority, and supernatural power.

» **Mytology in Sandekala Film**

Research concerning mythological meaning in Indonesian culture is also reflected in the study conducted by Anggara et al (2021)) on the short horror film Sandekala directed by Amriy Ramadhan. The film explores Indonesian traditional belief systems through cinematic representation, illustrating how local myths continue to shape collective imagination, moral values, and social behavior within society. Through horror narratives and visual symbolism, Sandekala demonstrates how myths remain relevant in contemporary culture and continue to function as instruments for preserving indigenous identity within modern media.

The main mythology depicted in this short film centres on the prohibition of leaving the house after sunset, especially after the call to Maghrib prayer. Javanese people believe that evil spirits or jinn roam during these hours and can kidnap people who are still outside their homes. This mythology tells of the existence of supernatural beings that disturb or kidnap children who are playing at dusk (Hidayatulloh, 2020).

The term Sandekala in Javanese refers to a specific period of time and is also related to legends from the mystical world. In this myth, the entity that appears at dusk is known as Jin Ummu Sibyan, a female spirit believed to be able to harm babies, children, and pregnant women (Anggara et al., 2021). According to local beliefs, these spirits appear at dusk to kidnap or harm anyone who is outside their homes during this vulnerable period.



Figure 5. Scene from the short film Sandekala (2015)

The meaning of the Sandekala myth remains a mystery because it cannot be empirically proven and is primarily passed down through folklore. This myth serves as a cultural warning a moral prohibition aimed at protecting individuals from potential danger (Hidayatulloh, 2020) the film Sandekala conveys a moral message about following traditional advice: avoiding activities outside the home during Maghrib, as this time should be used for prayer and family togetherness.

» **Javanese Myth Malam Satu Suro (1988)**

Film Malam Satu Suro directed by Sisworo Gautama Putra and written by Naryono, the film combines horror and romance elements while incorporating strong mystical themes rooted in Javanese belief systems. The narrative centers on Suketi, a woman who transforms into a Sundel Bolong after being resurrected from death by a Javanese shaman named Ki Rengga. Through supernatural rituals and metaphysical practices, the film portrays the interaction between the human world and the spiritual realm, reflecting the persistence of mystical beliefs within Javanese culture.



Figure 6. Poster for the 1988 film *Malam Satu Suro*

The central myth represented in the film is the belief surrounding Malam Satu Suro, a sacred night in the Javanese calendar associated with spiritual power, ritual practices, and supernatural activities. In Javanese tradition, Satu Suro is considered a spiritually significant period during which prayers, wishes, and rituals are believed to possess stronger metaphysical influence (Nur, 2016). The film represents Malam Satu Suro as a moment when the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds becomes increasingly fragile, enabling communication with supernatural beings and the performance of mystical rituals.

Within Javanese belief systems, Malam Satu Suro is frequently associated with spiritual reflection, purification, and the search for blessings or protection. Ritual activities performed during this night may include prayer ceremonies, meditation, ancestral offerings, and other forms of spiritual devotion intended to strengthen harmony between humans and unseen forces (Mukid, 2019). Through these representations, the film portrays Satu Suro not merely as a mystical tradition but also as a cultural symbol connected to spirituality, morality, and self-reflection within Javanese society.

However, through horror cinematic representation, the sacredness of Malam Satu Suro is simultaneously transformed into a source of fear and supernatural terror. The film reconstructs spiritual rituals and metaphysical beliefs into horror aesthetics designed to evoke suspense, mystery, and emotional tension among audiences. This representation demonstrates how Indonesian horror films frequently reinterpret traditional cultural practices through supernatural narratives that emphasize danger, curse, and mystical power.

From Barthes' perspective, myth functions as a cultural system that produces ideological meanings through symbols and representations. In *Malam Satu Suro*, the sacred night of Satu Suro is represented as a mystical space strongly associated with supernatural encounters, black magic, and spiritual danger.

Through cinematic construction, the film naturalizes the perception that Javanese spirituality is closely linked to occultism and mystical fear. Although the film contributes to preserving elements of traditional belief, it also commodifies sacred rituals by transforming them into popular horror entertainment.

The representation of Malam Satu Suro in Indonesian horror cinema reflects the broader role of myth within contemporary media culture. Mythological beliefs are not only maintained as cultural heritage but are also continuously reconstructed into visual narratives that shape audience perceptions of Javanese identity and spirituality. Through horror films, sacred traditions become symbolic instruments for constructing fear, suspense, and supernatural imagination while simultaneously preserving cultural memory within modern popular culture.

Myths as Cultural Teachings

Myths continue to play an important role in preserving cultural values and shaping collective beliefs within Javanese society. As part of cultural heritage, myths function not only as traditional stories but also as symbolic systems that communicate moral teachings, social norms, and spiritual values across generations (Dinda et al., 2019). The persistence of mythological beliefs in contemporary society demonstrates that myths remain relevant as cultural frameworks used to interpret human relationships with nature, spirituality, and social life. In Javanese culture, myths are closely connected to indigenous beliefs, Hindu-Javanese traditions, and Pre-Islamic cultural practices that continue to survive through folklore, legends, rituals, and oral narratives (Setiawan, 2021).

Myths often contain ethical teachings related to honesty, loyalty, obedience, courage, and respect for others. According to Ria (2021), mythical narratives function as cultural guidance that shapes community behavior and strengthens collective belief systems. Myths also help individuals understand natural phenomena and events beyond rational explanation, allowing communities to construct meaning regarding the unseen world and spiritual existence. In this context, myths operate as symbolic instruments that connect cultural identity with everyday social practices.

The educational function of myths is also reflected in their role as transmitters of wisdom, moral values, and social experience. Cultural teachings embedded within myths have been passed down for generations through storytelling and collective memory (*Heriyanti & Hartaka, 2022*). Although some myths have undergone transformation over time, they continue to function as mechanisms for preserving cultural identity and reinforcing communal values. Lauterboom (2023) explains that myths can serve as effective educational tools for introducing cultural norms and belief systems to younger generations.

Within Indonesian society, myths are frequently associated with spirituality and religion because cultural beliefs often coexist with religious practices (Laia, 2022). Myths therefore become part of the symbolic structures through which communities interpret both visible and invisible realities. As Jariah (2020) argues, humans tend to rely on cultural symbols to explain environmental and metaphysical phenomena that cannot be rationally understood. Through this process, myths become systems of meaning that shape social perceptions of morality, spirituality, and human existence.

The representation of myths as cultural teachings is strongly reflected in Indonesian horror cinema, particularly in films such as *Mangkujiwo*. The film portrays Javanese culture as closely associated with sacredness, mysticism, and supernatural belief systems. Elements such as traditional rituals, heirlooms, mystical songs, and spiritual practices are represented as central narrative components that construct fear and suspense within the horror genre (*Kurniawan & Santabudi, 2023*) through cinematic representation, myths are transformed into visual narratives that simultaneously communicate cultural teachings and create commercial entertainment.

From a cultural studies perspective, the representation of Javanese myths in horror films demonstrates how media reconstructs traditional beliefs into contemporary popular culture. Horror cinema does not merely preserve myths as cultural heritage but also commodifies them into horror aesthetics designed for mass audiences. This representation positions Javanese culture as strongly connected to mysticism and supernaturalism, reinforcing collective perceptions of Java as a cultural space associated with spiritual power, sacred rituals, and mystery. At the same time, films such as *Mangkujiwo* contribute to maintaining cultural identity by introducing traditional language, customs, and belief systems to modern audiences through cinematic storytelling.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian horror films often explore local myths as key elements of their stories, particularly those from Javanese culture. Javanese myths often serve as symbols in horror films, representing values, beliefs, or fears perceived by Javanese society. Indonesian horror films are an effective medium for preserving and popularising these myths in visual form, creating a link between the past and the present. In addition to being enjoyable to watch, films that feature Javanese myths also serve as a tool for cultural education. Viewers, especially the younger generation, can learn about the cultural values, traditions, and beliefs of Javanese society. Javanese myths adapted in horror films often have deep symbolic meanings. These meanings can reflect the values, norms, and philosophical concepts of Javanese society. In the context of horror films, these myths can be interpreted as

social criticism or as a way to convey moral messages to the audience.

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