

Narrative structure, symbolic meaning, and cultural expression in contemporary Indonesian horror cinema



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates narrative strategies in contemporary Indonesian horror films to understand how they convey cultural meanings and engage audiences. While horror is often dismissed as entertainment, Indonesian horror serves as a cultural mirror, reflecting societal fears, spiritual beliefs, and identity struggles. The study focuses on eight films released between 2019 and 2024, selected for their narrative complexity, cultural relevance, and critical reception. Using qualitative narrative analysis, the research applies Seymour Chatman's distinction between story and discourse alongside classical and modern narrative theories by Bordwell, Todorov, Genette, and others. The analysis identifies three-act and five-act structures and nonlinear, circular, and episodic narratives. These structures enhance suspense, emotional engagement, and thematic depth. The findings show that Indonesian horror films blend local folklore, Islamic rituals, and communal values with experimental storytelling. For example, *Siksa Kubur* uses fragmented timelines to depict trauma, while *Qodrat* integrates religious exorcism into its plot structure. Such strategies deepen audience immersion and articulate culturally specific anxieties. This research contributes to Indonesian cinema studies by highlighting how narrative form shapes meaning and emotional impact. It offers a framework for analyzing horror beyond Western paradigms and provides insights into how traditional and modern storytelling coexist in Southeast Asian media. Academically, it advances narrative theory in a non-Western context. Practically, it supports filmmakers and cultural producers in using horror to engage with social issues and connect with global audiences through culturally grounded storytelling.



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1. Introduction

Indonesian horror cinema has emerged as a significant cultural artifact, providing a compelling lens to examine the interplay between storytelling and societal consciousness. Far from mere entertainment, these films serve as cultural texts encapsulating historical anxieties, spiritual beliefs, and communal values unique to the Indonesian socio-cultural landscape. Over the past few decades, the genre has not only gained prominence within the national cinematic tradition. Still, it has also attracted scholarly attention for its nuanced engagement with themes of identity, tradition, and modernity. In contrast to conventional Western horror, which typically relies on jump scares and formulaic plots, Indonesian horror often integrates otherworldly dread with indigenous culture, rituals, and belief systems. Despite its growing global appeal, this genre's narrative structures and techniques have garnered minimal attention in scholarly discourse. This study explores the mechanisms by which Indonesian horror films create and disseminate meaning through narrative structure and how these decisions engage with cultural identity and audience involvement. By analyzing how specific narrative

strategies such as folklore adaptation, spatial symbolism, and character archetypes mediate cultural expression, this study sheds light on the role of Indonesian horror cinema in shaping cultural narratives and fostering audience engagement.

Historically, horror has occupied a pivotal position in Indonesia's film industry. The genre has developed alongside the nation's political and cultural shifts, from early portrayals of local legends in the 1950s and 60s to the supernatural epics of the Suzzanna era in the 1980s. Post-Reformasi, contemporary Indonesian horror has adopted hybrid forms, integrating folklore, Islamic mysticism, and modern filmmaking methods. Recent box office triumphs and critical recognition (e.g., "*Pengabdi Setan*," "*Impetigore*," "*Qodrat*") demonstrate a sustained popular intrigue with horror as entertainment and a medium for cultural introspection. As these films evolve in complexity regarding content and structure, they provide many opportunities for scholarly exploration. This enduring popularity and evolving narrative sophistication invite deeper theoretical engagement, particularly with how horror stories are structured and experienced. In this context, the scholarly investigation of narrative in horror films highlights its essential function in organizing cinematic storytelling and influencing emotional involvement and audience immersion.

As David Bordwell and associates delineated, the scholarly investigation of narrative in horror films highlights its essential function in organizing cinematic storytelling and influencing emotional involvement and audience immersion. The classical narrative framework offers a valuable basis for comprehending how films shape audience perception via cause-and-effect reasoning, chronological sequence, and character-centric trajectories [1]. Indonesian horror cinema exemplifies this in films such as "*Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion*" (2022), which utilizes a distinct three-act format to heighten suspense and provide a cathartic ending. Classical models alone cannot encapsulate the intricacies of most modern Indonesian horror narratives, which frequently diverge from linearity to portray psychological pain or cultural ambiguity [2], [3]. The structuralist views of Tzvetan Todorov and Gérard Genette are particularly pertinent here. Todorov's theory of narrative equilibrium and disequilibrium elucidates how horror films violate normative order via supernatural interference, a prevalent technique in films such as "*Siksa Kubur*" (2024), where the disruption of temporal sequence reflects the protagonist's fragmented mind. Genette's notion of narrative time, particularly his examination of anachrony (including flashbacks and foreshadowing), clarifies how Indonesian horror films exploit chronology to enhance mystery and thematic depth.

The emotional aspect of the narrative is crucial, alongside its structure. Academics like Murray Smith and Carl Plantinga contribute to the discourse by examining how storytelling techniques evoke emotional and cognitive responses [4], [5]. Their concepts of character alignment, empathy, and affective realism are pivotal in understanding why Indonesian horror delves into psychological depth despite its fantasy elements. For instance, "*Impetigore*" (2019) relies on the haunting recollection of ancestral transgressions to captivate viewers, fostering an emotional connection with the protagonist's quest for identity. These insights demonstrate that emotional engagement is not an incidental aspect but an integral component of the story's structure. Smith's concept of alignment and allegiance elucidates how audiences are encouraged to engage with characters emotionally. Plantinga's analysis of horror emotions, encompassing fear, disgust, and moral revulsion, reveals how these reactions are regulated throughout the narrative. Nevertheless, despite these theoretical advancements, a significant deficiency persists in applying these frameworks to non-Western contexts, especially within Southeast Asian horror. Most narrative theories focus on Western cinema, frequently neglecting the influence of culturally distinctive elements such as Islamic eschatology, village rites, and ancestral taboos on narrative structure and audience reception in Indonesian films. This study bridges the gap by integrating classical and affective storytelling theories to analyze how Indonesian horror filmmakers construct their narratives to evoke suspense while articulating culturally ingrained fears and beliefs. This research highlights the necessity of examining how Indonesian horror films generate locally significant and internationally comprehensible meaning by connecting narrative structure with audience engagement and emotional reaction.

This study engages with and builds upon key theoretical frameworks in film studies to examine the evolving narrative structures within contemporary Indonesian horror cinema. Mulvey's critique of the cinematic gaze and its role in reinforcing cultural ideology is further explored by examining how Indonesian horror disrupts traditional gender representations [6]. Often, female characters in Indonesian horror films hold positions of spiritual authority and narrative authority. Hooks' [7] analysis of race, gender, and class is particularly relevant in examining how recent Indonesian horror

films interrogate postcolonial identity and socio-religious hierarchies, offering subversive perspectives through local myths and Islamic mysticism. Altman's [8] analysis of race, gender, and class is particularly relevant in examining how recent Indonesian horror films interrogate postcolonial identity and socio-religious hierarchies. These films offer subversive perspectives through local myths and Islamic mysticism. Manovich's [9] Insights into digital aesthetics inform this study's analysis of how Indonesian horror filmmakers use new technologies, such as CGI and digital editing, to experiment with nonlinear storytelling and surreal atmospheres that reflect psychological and cultural complexity. Finally, Naficy's [10] theories on accented cinema support this study's positioning of Indonesian horror as a culturally situated, globally resonant form of storytelling. This research uniquely contributes to these theoretical conversations by demonstrating how Indonesian horror cinema reconfigures narrative conventions and theoretical assumptions, offering a hybridized model of genre, identity, and technology in post-Reformasi film practice.

This research utilizes qualitative narrative analysis to investigate the storytelling techniques employed in modern Indonesian horror cinema. This research examines how story form conveys social concerns, spiritual beliefs, and psychological worries, recognizing that horror is a cultural barometer within a particular context. The study focuses on eight Indonesian horror films published between 2019 and 2024, chosen for their cultural relevance, economic success, and narrative complexity, rather than performing a cross-national comparison. Utilizing Seymour Chatman's narrative theory—specifically the differentiation between tale (the content) and discourse (the presentation)—the analysis examines the organization of events, character developments, and temporal sequences to generate emotional resonance and thematic complexity. Furthermore, traditional models (*e.g.*, three-act and five-act structures) and modern frameworks (*e.g.*, circular and nonlinear tales) comprehend how filmmakers create tension, control pacing, and captivate audiences using culturally significant storytelling methods. This method emphasizes story form and purpose, showcasing the formal innovations in Indonesian horror and their significance in expressing societal concerns and moral difficulties.

Cultural contexts play a crucial role in shaping narrative choices in horror films. This study examines how different cultural backgrounds influence storytelling approaches, highlighting the distinct characteristics of various horror traditions. For example, Japanese horror often integrates folklore and supernatural beliefs, resulting in narrative structures that differ significantly from those in Western horror cinema. A comparative analysis of these alternative strategies will provide deeper insights into how horror films can go beyond conventional storytelling methods, introducing fresh perspectives and innovative narrative techniques. The discussion will also emphasize the importance of recognizing and appreciating the diversity of narrative strategies within the Indonesian horror genre, where creativity and cultural expression intersect to produce compelling and thought-provoking narratives. This research seeks to rigorously analyze narrative strategies in Indonesian horror films, offering a profound perspective on their role as cultural products that entertain and stimulate critical reflection among viewers. This study contextualizes the discourse within the broader framework of Indonesian culture and society to elevate the acknowledgment of the horror genre as an essential element of the national cinematic landscape. This research highlights the genre's ability to influence cultural discourse by examining its thematic intricacy and narrative techniques. This work advances cinema studies, cultural studies, and Southeast Asian media scholarship by shifting the focus from the significance of Indonesian horror films to how they articulate their representations. The research clarifies the usage of narrative structure by analyzing the form and aim of narrative tactics.

2. Method

This study utilizes narrative analysis to effectively examine storytelling techniques and thematic elements in Indonesian horror films. This qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth examination of narrative construction within the genre, emphasizing the methods filmmakers use to express cultural fears, societal issues, and psychological themes through storytelling. This research analyses the narratives of these films to uncover the underlying messages and cultural significance that resonate with Indonesian audiences. This study employs Seymour Chatman's narrative structure theory to inform the analysis, distinguishing between two essential components of narrative: story (the "what," encompassing events and characters) and discourse (the "how," referring to the expression and arrangement of the story). This dual-structure framework facilitates a systematic narrative content analysis and delivery across various media [11]. To better understand Indonesian horror film narrative

strategies, This research utilizes classical and contemporary story structure theories to examine the plot organization of Indonesian horror films. These include the three-act structure, five-act structure, circular narrative, and nonlinear narrative. These structural frameworks facilitate the analysis of narrative progression, turning points, climactic sequences, and their contributions to films' emotional and thematic impact. This study examines eight Indonesian horror films released from 2019 to 2024, selected based on their significance, commercial success, and cultural impact. Films were deemed significant based on their ability to garner scholarly interest, receive critical acclaim, or be showcased at local or international film festivals. Commercial success was evaluated via box office performance, ticket sales, and audience ratings. The cultural impact was assessed through an analysis of media coverage, social media discussions, and critical evaluations, emphasizing the contribution of each film to the development of cultural narratives and public discourse. The final selection demonstrates a variety of narrative strategies and thematic issues present in contemporary Indonesian horror cinema. Table 1 displays the films examined in this research.

Table 1. Selected films

Title/Original title	Year	Length	IMDB Rating
The Corpse Washer/Pemandi Jenazah	(2024)	1h 47m	6.2/10
Grave Torture/Siksa Kubur	(2024)	1h 57m	6.2/10
Dancing Village: The Curse Begins/Badarawuhi di Desa Penari	(2024)	2h 2m	5.7/10
The Train of Death/Kereta berdarah	(2024)	1h 43m	4.7/10
Satan's Slaves 2: Communion Pengabdian Setan 2: Communion	(2022)	1h 58h	6.7/10
Qodrat	(2022)	1h 42m	6.3/10
Impetigore/Perempuan tanah jahanam	(2019)	1h 46m	6.6/10

The data extraction procedure started with a comprehensive screening of each film. The analysis was performed repeatedly to guarantee a thorough knowledge of story structures, character development, and thematic elements. Particular focus was directed towards story development, pace, suspense, tension, and depicting people and their trajectories. The analysis of each film was conducted through the examination of the subsequent narrative components: (1) Story elements include key events such as inciting incidents, climaxes, and resolutions; characters characterized by their roles, arcs, and psychological depth; and settings encompass physical and symbolic spaces; (2) Discourse elements include narrative order (linear versus nonlinear), duration and pacing, frequency of narrative components, point of view and focalization, and the presence or absence of a narrator. The investigation examined the narrative structure, cultural elements, and local folklore essential to Indonesian horror films. The research analyzed the integration of traditional beliefs, cultural norms, and modern challenges into storylines, exploring how filmmakers created terror that connected with local audiences. This emphasis was crucial, placing the films into the broader framework of Indonesian culture and socioeconomic dynamics, facilitating a more profound and nuanced understanding of their tales. Films were classified based on their narrative strategies to facilitate a comparative study, highlighting similar themes and approaches among the chosen films. This comparative approach analyzed how many films tackled analogous themes, including the dread of the supernatural, cultural taboos, and psychological terror. The research aimed to emphasize the distinctive traits of the horror genre and the overarching cultural narratives that shaped its evolution.

3. Results and Discussion

The narrative strategy analysis in Indonesian horror films produces several significant findings illuminating the genre's evolution. Through careful examination of storytelling techniques, technical elements, and thematic content, this research reveals how Indonesian horror cinema has preserved traditional narrative forms and embraced contemporary innovations. The findings demonstrate the complex interplay between local cultural elements and global horror conventions while highlighting how Indonesian filmmakers have developed distinct approaches to genre storytelling. This section inquires into a comprehensive analysis of the findings, exploring their significance in comprehending the trajectory of Indonesian horror cinema and broader scholarly discussions in film studies and cultural analysis. The results provide novel insights into how narrative strategies in horror films adapt and respond to evolving social contexts, technological advancements, and shifting audience expectations within Indonesia's dynamic film industry. Indonesian horror films often rely on well-established narrative structures, typically the three-act and five-act frameworks, to deliver their

chilling tales. These structures are foundational to storytelling (Table 2), offering a clear and logical progression of events that allow audiences to engage deeply with the narrative while experiencing a carefully crafted build-up of tension and ultimate resolution. Filmmakers adhere to traditional frameworks to ensure their stories remain accessible and compelling, balancing complexity and clarity.

Table 2. Narrative Structure

Title	Narrative Structure
The Corpse Washer /Pemandi Jenazah (2024)	Three-act structure
Grave Torture/Siksa Kubur (2024)	Alternative /Flashback
Dancing Village: The Curse Begins /Badarawuhi di Desa Penari (2024)	Circular narratives
The Train of Death /Kereta berdarah (2024)	Episodic structure
Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion (2022)	Three-act structure
Qodrat (2022)	Five-act structure
Impetigore /Perempuan tanah jahanam (2019)	Circular narratives

The three-act structure, a staple in global cinema, divides the narrative into three phases: setup, confrontation, and resolution. In this model, the first act introduces the world of the story and its characters, and the central conflict—the second act, often the most extended, deals with the challenges and escalating tensions the characters face. Finally, the third act brings the story to a climactic resolution, where conflicts are addressed, and the narrative arc concludes. This structure is exemplified in films like *"Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion"* [12]. The setup phase immerses viewers in the eerie atmosphere of a haunted apartment complex, introducing the main characters and hinting at the supernatural forces at play. The confrontation phase intensifies the horror as unexplained and increasingly terrifying events unravel the characters' lives. The resolution ties the story together in a climactic confrontation with the supernatural, providing a satisfying and dramatic closure. The adaptation of folklore into film presents a unique form of "indirect" folklorism, where cultural narratives are transmitted through alternative media rather than directly replicated in their original form. In the case of *"Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion"* [12], visual elements play a pivotal role alongside narrative strategy in reinforcing Indonesian cultural identity. These visuals are deeply rooted in local traditions, beliefs, and societal contexts, serving as a powerful medium for conveying cultural nuances and collective anxieties.

The film's supernatural imagery, including ghostly apparitions and ritualistic elements, draws heavily from Indonesian folklore and Islamic traditions. For instance, the portrayal of spirits, shadowy figures, and sacred objects reflects local superstitions surrounding death, the afterlife, and the concept of the *arwah* (spirits of the deceased). As a representation of its narrative strategy, these visual elements resonate deeply with the collective consciousness, emphasizing the cultural significance of honoring ancestors and the spiritual repercussions of disregarding traditional beliefs. Through the skillful integration of cultural elements into its visual storytelling, *"Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion"* [12] strengthens its narrative structure while firmly anchoring its horror within Indonesia's cultural identity. This approach profoundly resonates with local audiences and provides international viewers with an insightful glimpse into the complexities of Indonesian culture. Similarly, the five-act structure offers an alternative yet equally effective framework, allowing for a more gradual and nuanced exploration of characters and themes. This structure, rooted in classical storytelling traditions, divides the narrative into five phases: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Films like *"Qodrat"* [13] showcase the utility of this framework, with the exposition carefully establishing the protagonist's background and the initial setting. The rising action introduces layers of conflict and tension, leading to a powerful and often emotionally charged climax. The subsequent falling action provides a space to address the aftermath of the climax, paving the way for a resolution that ties up loose ends while leaving a lasting impression on the audience.

The visual elements in *"Qodrat"* [13] are deeply intertwined with Indonesian cultural identity, reflecting the nation's religious, spiritual, and communal values. Through cinematography, symbolism, and mise-en-scène, the film portrays the interplay between faith, tradition, and the supernatural, anchoring its narrative in the cultural fabric of Indonesia. Visuals often emphasize communal rituals and gatherings, reflecting the cultural value of togetherness in overcoming challenges. Scenes of collective prayers or community discussions highlight the importance of solidarity, a cornerstone of Indonesian identity. The juxtaposition of individual struggles with community resilience mirrors the cultural belief that personal redemption often intertwines with

collective well-being [14]. In "*Qodrat*" [13], these visual elements enhance the storytelling and serve as a cultural lens through which the audience can explore Indonesia's identity. By weaving Islamic faith, folklore, and traditional settings into its visuals, the film profoundly reflects on the nation's cultural values, creating a uniquely Indonesian and universally relatable narrative. These narrative structures are deeply aligned with classical theories of storytelling, such as Freytag's Pyramid, which emphasizes the importance of a structured progression to maintain audience engagement. Freytag's model underscores how each narrative phase builds upon the previous one, creating a cohesive and emotionally resonant experience. Indonesian horror films honor traditional storytelling techniques while ensuring their tales of terror resonate with local and international audiences. This meticulous structuring of events maintains a balance between suspense, character development, and thematic depth, making Indonesian horror a compelling and culturally significant genre.

In addition to traditional narrative structures, many Indonesian horror films have begun experimenting with alternative storytelling strategies, showcasing the genre's adaptability and creative potential. According to the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that nonlinear storytelling techniques are employed in Indonesian horror webtoons to evoke fear and engage readers [15]. These innovative approaches often deviate from linear narratives, opting for techniques that challenge conventional storytelling norms and offer audiences a fresh and engaging experience. Among these, nonlinear storytelling has emerged as a particularly popular and effective method, allowing filmmakers to fragment timelines and interweave events from the past and present [16], [17]. By doing so, they heighten the sense of mystery and suspense and invite viewers to reconstruct the narrative actively, fostering a deeper level of engagement and immersion [18]. One notable example of this approach is "*Siksa Kubur*" [19], which skillfully employs flashbacks to delve into the protagonists' traumatic past while advancing the central plot. The film's fragmented timeline blurs the boundaries between memory and reality, creating a layered narrative that keeps viewers guessing about the connections between past events and the unfolding horror. This technique adds complexity to the storytelling and enriches character development as the audience learns how past experiences shape the characters' present actions and fears. This finding supports Wahyuni *et al.*'s experiment on employing a nonlinear narrative [20].

Such nonlinear techniques align with postmodern narrative theories, which challenge traditional notions of linearity and emphasize the exploration of fragmented identities and realities. This finding is consistent with that of Priyambodho and Suwito, who highlight the influence of post-modernism on the genre, noting the presence of "narrative instability" and the "melting-down of boundaries and social norms about taboos." [21]. Post-modernism often seeks to destabilize fixed perspectives, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of human experience. By embracing these principles, Indonesian horror films like "*Siksa Kubur*" [19] push the genre's boundaries, crafting intellectually stimulating and emotionally impactful stories. Their fragmented narratives resonate with broader cultural and psychological themes, such as trauma's persistence and memory-identity interplay, making them particularly suited to the horror genre's exploration of the unknown and the uncanny [17]. Moreover, these alternative narrative strategies reflect the broader evolution of Indonesian cinema, as filmmakers increasingly experiment with form and structure to stand out in a competitive global market. These innovations highlight the genre's versatility and contribute to its growing international recognition. By moving beyond conventional storytelling frameworks, Indonesian horror films demonstrate their capacity to captivate audiences with thought-provoking and deeply unsettling narratives.

Other films adopt anthological or episodic structures, presenting interconnected vignettes that contribute to a larger thematic narrative. This approach allows for a diverse exploration of themes and characters within a single film [22]–[24], as seen in works like "*The Train of Death*" [25], which potentially follows the eerie fates of different passengers on a haunted train. These films deviate from a conventional, linear storyline, reflecting contemporary storytelling trends prioritizing thematic exploration over plot coherence [22], [26]. Circular narratives, where a story begins and ends simultaneously, are increasingly utilized in Indonesian horror cinema to underscore themes of inevitability and the inescapable nature of specific fates. This storytelling technique emphasizes the cyclical nature of events, suggesting that characters are often trapped in a loop dictated by past actions, traditions, or curses. In "*Dancing Village: The Curse Begins*" [27], the narrative structure underscores the inescapable consequences of the characters' interactions with supernatural forces. The film begins by establishing a village deeply rooted in superstition and ritual. As the plot unfolds, the protagonists' actions inevitably lead them back to the same ominous circumstances they initially encountered,

reinforcing the cyclical nature of their fate. This circular narrative structure aligns with theories of narrative determinism, which emphasize the inevitability of specific outcomes. Furthermore, this finding extends Sutandio's [28] study on *"Impetigore"* [29], another Indonesian horror film, in which he argues that traditional mysticism can be utilized to construct cyclical story structures, binding characters to ancient curses or cultural practices.

Indonesian horror films employ circular narratives to delve deeper into cultural and psychological themes, reflecting societal beliefs in fate and the lasting effects of ancestral actions. This storytelling technique not only enhances the narrative's depth by introducing layers of meaning but also encourages audiences to contemplate the broader implications of the cyclical nature of the story. Incorporating such structures allows filmmakers to explore complex themes within the horror genre, offering a rich storytelling tapestry that resonates with local and international audiences. The use of circular narratives is a powerful tool to convey the persistence of specific cultural motifs and the inescapability of destiny, making these films compelling and thought-provoking. Across both traditional and alternative narrative strategies, Indonesian horror films consistently integrate cultural and religious elements as foundational components of their storytelling. This integration enriches the narrative and grounds the supernatural elements in a culturally resonant context. For instance, films like *"Qodrat"* [13] and *"The Corpse Washer"* [30] draw heavily on Islamic rituals and beliefs, using them as plot devices and metaphors for more significant existential questions. Similarly, *"Dancing Village: The Curse Begins"* [27] likely incorporates traditional dance and folklore, blending cultural heritage with horror to create a unique narrative experience. These strategies align with cultural theory, which emphasizes the role of storytelling in preserving and interrogating cultural identity. The findings of this study also align with existing research on narrative strategies in global horror cinema, highlighting the genre's ability to adapt and innovate within established frameworks. For example, studies on East Asian horror films have similarly noted a balance between traditional storytelling and experimental approaches, reflecting shared cultural and aesthetic priorities [31]. Situating Indonesian horror within this broader context reveals that the genre not only aligns with global cinematic trends but also presents a distinctive perspective shaped by local cultural and religious influences [26], [28], [32], [33].

4. Conclusion

Contemporary Indonesian horror films skillfully blend traditional narrative structures with innovative storytelling techniques to explore intricate cultural, psychological, and sociological themes. The strategic application of three-act and five-act structures enhances narrative clarity and emotional resonance, making these films accessible to a diverse audience. Traditional structures, evident in films like *"Qodrat"* and *"Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion,"* provide reliable narrative frameworks that maintain a tense pace, foster significant character development, and deliver emotionally resonant conclusions. These structures anchor narratives in familiar structures, making them captivating despite their exploration of foreign or otherworldly themes. Indonesian horror filmmakers increasingly experiment with unconventional techniques, such as nonlinear, circular, and anthological storylines, to challenge traditional viewer assumptions and enrich thematic depth. These methods showcase artistic originality and delve into profound issues related to memory, trauma, identity, and destiny. For instance, *"Siksa Kubur"* employs a disjointed timeline that mirrors the protagonist's psychological turmoil, amplifying the terror through structural ambiguity. *"Dancing Village: The Curse Begins"* utilizes a cyclical narrative to emphasize the inevitability of ancestral curses, connecting narrative structure to traditional beliefs in fate and transgression. These examples demonstrate how story experimentation serves as a mechanism for investigating and articulating culturally specific concerns, particularly those related to the supernatural, collective guilt, and spiritual disconnection. The use of local folklore, Islamic customs, and communal ceremonies further solidifies the cultural distinctiveness of these films. Instead of merely embellishing the narrative with symbolic connections, these aspects serve as fundamental narrative catalysts. *"Qodrat"* illustrates Islamic exorcism rites and employs them structurally to propel the narrative and settle the primary conflict. The film synchronizes narrative development with cultural and spiritual reasoning, providing viewers with a culturally anchored and emotionally engaging story. The ramifications of these findings transcend narrative theory and permeate the broader domain of culture and media studies. As examined here, Indonesian horror is both an expressive genre and a cultural discourse that navigates modernity, tradition, and identity. The films analyzed in this research entertain and stimulate contemplation on communal anxieties, hereditary convictions, and the ethical ramifications of

violating social and spiritual limits. This confirms the genre's ability to function as a narrative framework for reconciling conflicts between the past and present, the holy and the profane, and the local and the global. This research portrays a notable gap in the existing literature by focusing on the narrative structure of Indonesian horror, an aspect often overshadowed by analyses centered on theme or genre. It offers a narrative-theoretical perspective within Southeast Asian cinema studies, highlighting the vital role of storytelling form in shaping cultural meaning. By positioning Indonesian horror as a dynamic space where local traditions intersect with global storytelling conventions, the study contributes to broader discussions in global horror scholarship. This study has limitations. The research focused on eight films produced between 2019 and 2024, which, despite their diversity, may not encompass the complete spectrum of narrative innovation in the broader context of Indonesian horror cinema. Moreover, the study depended on textual and structural analysis, excluding audience reception data. Future studies should integrate viewer reactions to ascertain how audiences comprehend and emotionally connect with these storytelling tactics, particularly across various age groups, locations, and religious affiliations. Future research may broaden this investigation in multiple avenues: a longitudinal study assessing narrative evolution over several decades; a comparative analysis of Indonesian horror and other Southeast Asian horror traditions (e.g., Thai or Malaysian cinema); or empirical audience studies evaluating emotional and cognitive engagement with diverse narrative strategies. An intriguing topic for investigation is the impact of digital and streaming platforms on narrative innovation in Indonesian horror, particularly as the genre gets accepted on worldwide platforms such as Netflix.

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