



The semiotic analysis of counter-myths and dominant myths in three Indonesian horror movies

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ABSTRACT

Movie scenes reflect a society's sociological perspectives, including the dynamic relationship between dominant myths and counter-myths. Sociologically, there are some Indonesians who still believe in and practise counter-myths, including witchcraft and supernatural beliefs (animism and dynamism), while still believing in dominant myths like Islamic teachings. Based on this assumption, this study semiotically examines the references found in the scenes of three contemporary Indonesian horror movies (*Pengabdian Setan*, *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*, and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1*) that reflect dominant myths and counter-myths. These horror movies contain scenes consisting of both dominant myths and counter-myths that stand for themselves as well as reconcile with each other dialectically. One main purpose for this study is to extend semiotics from its conventional roles to an academic tool that can map the contemporary sociological trends that take place in a society. Moreover, the findings show several dominant and counter-myths in the selected Indonesian horror movies. Several scenes reflect the dialectical reconciliations between dominant myths and counter-myths (the negative dialectics), like between Islamic teachings and witchcraft practices and between Islamic teachings and supernatural beliefs (animism and dynamism). In addition, the motives that compel people to prioritise counter-myths over dominant myths are related to treasure (*harta*) and sexual desires (*hasrat seksual*). In contrast, the motives that urge others to prioritise dominant myths over counter-myths are related to safety (*keselamatan*) and regret (*penyesalan*). From this point of view, there's a necessity to re-apply the idea of Postmillennial Gothic comprehensively to Indonesian movies in the form of film models because of the current cultural and sociological setting that requires its implementation in the Indonesian society.

Keywords: *Counter-myth, dominant myth, motives, dialectical reconciliation, and sociological reflection*

INTRODUCTION

Although foreign researchers (like anthropologists, culturologists, and folklorists) infrequently examine sinister stories in Indonesia, this country still has much to offer in terms of unexplored myths (Frolova, 2021; Gibraltar et al., 2023). Indeed, every village in Indonesia has unexplored myths in the form of folklore and sinister stories (BiCo Story, 2019). In fact, there are several documented examples of unexplored myths and sinister stories in Indonesia. The first example is the belief in the demonic doll from Java Island, namely *Nini Towong*, a female Javanese effigy that supernatural creatures can possess by using specific rituals. The doll can do specific things like rap, nod, and point, predict the weather and harvest time, tell fortunes, etc (Chan, 2017). The second example is a ghost that is dressed with a shroud all over its body and moves by jumping, called *Pocong*. It is believed that this ghost has the ability to spit on foods that are sold by humans, and consequently, the food becomes delicious and attracts many buyers (Frolova, 2021). The third example is the *Kanjeng Ratu Kidul* story. The female character in this story is very beautiful and sexy, with a voluptuous body and long hair. In addition, she wears an Indian costume. She has many roles in the supernatural world, including as the leader of the supernatural army, the lover of the kings on Java Island, the protector of fishermen, and as a sexual predator (Strassler, 2014).

However, at the same time, Indonesians also believe in dominant myths like Islamic teachings, since most of them are Muslims (Frolova, 2021), and family values (Josua et al., 2019). Essentially, this setting is beneficial for expanding semiotic studies since there is a semiotic theory that theorises myths (Gibraltar et al., 2023), and the study of myth is useful in some countries sociologically (Baier, 2017; Banos & Rodriguez, 2016). There is a strong possibility that semiotics can be expanded from its previous utilities such as exploring signs or the system of signs (Li, 2017), deciphering hidden myths inside cultural products (Monticelli, 2016), bringing change to the human mind and human behaviours (Bogdanovic, 2020), and portraying the development of -ism (such as feminism) in a country (Cheang, 2022) to become an academic tool that can map the sociological trends and propose a film model based on the findings.

One way to achieve this is by examining the dominant myths and the counter-myths in movies and figuring out their sociological reflections. Presently, there are three Indonesian horror movies (*Pengabdi Setan*, *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*, and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1*) that contain dominant myths and counter-myths. Particularly, *Pengabdi Setan* talks about a family, which faces unnatural supernatural events after the death of the mother. Rini (the daughter), who is helped by her grandmother's friend, a pious person, and his only son, tries to reveal the secret that is hidden within the family (Anwar, 2017). Moreover, *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur* tells a story about a pretty woman named Suzanna, who has a perfect household and is pregnant. Sadly, her future is destroyed after some robbers kill her brutally. Supernaturally, she is transformed into *Sundel Bolong* that seeks revenge on them (Umbara, 2018). Lastly, *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1* tells a story about a young woman named Alfie who hates her family after the tragic death of her mother and her father's second marriage. Unfortunately, her father falls ill. It turns out that her father has become a demon worshipper by sacrificing Alfie's mother, and now, the demon wants Alfie as its next victim (Tjahjanto, 2018).

Islamic teachings can be classified as the dominant paradigm. Whereas supernatural beliefs (animism and dynamism), witchcraft practices, and beliefs that contradict family values can be classified as counter-myths in Indonesia. Undoubtedly, the dominant myth is the belief that supports the existence of Islamic teachings or family values. In contrast, the counter-myth is the belief that contradicts religious teachings or family values. Therefore,

this study has two research questions: What are the modes of dominant myths portrayed in the selected three Indonesian horror movies? Also, what are the modes of counter-myths depicted in the same Indonesian horror movies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A movie or film is a strong piece of equipment, supported by technology and sociocultural development, that reconstructs, restructures, and reshapes the realities that exist in a society since this medium portrays the ideologies, policies, and observations of the filmmakers. Also, semiotics itself is a study of signs (Sabran et al., 2022). Theoretically, semiotics is different from conventional criticism since the former correlates with a culture and is concerned with the processes by which meaning is formed (Jafar et al., 2022). In this study, semiotics functions as a tool to decipher the myths in the selected movies and map the sociological trend in the Indonesian society.

Specifically, this study uses Barthes' modified semiotic theory combined with other theories. Barthes' semiotic theory consists of denotative and connotative levels. Particularly, the observable meaning is processed at the denotative level while the hidden meaning that connects to sociocultural and personal associations is deduced at the connotative level. Furthermore, Barthes formulates the myth as the product of the analysis, which can naturalise and justify the dominant modes of thought (Mendoza, 2019). In some cases, the myth offers the solution to a societal problem (Manan et al., 2023), since it helps people rationalise the world in which they live. In this case, Barthes' semiotic theory functions as the theoretical container, which is filled with other theories (Gibraltar et al., 2023). A depiction of Barthes' modified semiotic theory is presented in Figure 1.

1. Signifier	2. Signifier
Denotative sign	
3. Connotative Signifier	4. Connotative Signified Berger (Concreteness of Signifier and Signified, Camera Shooting, Motion of Camera, and Visual Language), Barker (Colours Theories) Darmaprawira (Indonesian Colours Theory), and Reid (counter and dominant myths), and Adorno (Negative Dialectics).
Myths as the end product	

Figure 1. Barthes' modified semiotic theory

The reason why Barthes' semiotic theory is linked with the concepts of the dominant myth and the counter-myth is that this semiotic theory has a weakness since it always deciphers the dominant ideology (Griffin et al., 2019). Therefore, the semiotic concepts from Reid about dominant myth and counter-myth are added to perfect it since these concepts fix the theoretical gap of Barthes' semiotic theory, by covering two kinds of myths (dominant myths and counter-myths). So, this is the first theoretical gap that is fixed by this study. By definition, a counter-myth is the type of myth that attempts to contradict the dominant myth. In contrast, the dominant myth is the ideological property owned by parts of a society that control its social and political power (Gibraltar et al., 2023).

Sometimes dominant myths and counter-myths can reconcile dialectically and equally, and in this case, the dialectical relationship between dominant myth and counter-myth doesn't follow the Hegelian way (Kenneth, 2020). In fact, this differs from Reid's idea of the decolonial project since she assumes that it can be done by countering the

dominant myths, even though sometimes it's not necessary since in some cases, the dominant myths reconcile with the counter-myths in a non-Hegelian way (Gibraltar et al., 2023). In other words, the second theoretical gap has been addressed by adding the concept of negative dialectics from Adorno. In conclusion, although the theoretical framework combines many concepts, it can be assumed that this is a semiotic study for three main reasons. First, it still uses Barthes' semiotic theory as its core theory. Second, it uses a modified Barthes's semiotic theory that perfects the weaknesses of the conventional Barthes' semiotic theory and Reid's decolonial project. Third, the theoretical frameworks enable the researchers to do what Barthes has done by reading the signs (micro-level analysis) at a sociological level (macro-level analysis) (Varga, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study used three contemporary Indonesian horror movies as its units of analysis. Moreover, the main reason why the three Indonesian horror movies (*Pengabdian Setan*, *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*, and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1*) were used as the units of analysis is that all of them contain counter-myths, dominant myths, and represents the reconciliation between dominant myths and counter-myths. Specifically, *Pengabdian Setan* obtained 4,206,103 viewers (Persatuan Artis Film Indonesia, 2021) and won the Best Film category at the Overlook Film Festival and as the scariest movie at the Popcorn Frights Film Festivals 2018 (Armenia, 2018). In the same way, *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur* obtained 3,346,185 viewers (Persatuan Artis Film Indonesia, 2021), although it did not win any awards at international film festivals. On the other hand, *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1* won Best Film in the category of Midnight Xtreme at the International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia 2018 (Riantrisnanto, 2018), even though it only obtained less than 3,000,000 viewers (Persatuan Artis Film Indonesia, 2021). It must be noted that these three contemporary horror movies are very good. The reason being they portray the current sociological settings of the contemporary Indonesian society.

The present study utilised qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is an effort to examine cultural artefacts by drawing on the communicated messages (Call, 2019) and generating knowledge from them (Brylla, 2018). Also, this study involved three coding classifications: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Gibbs defined coding as a way of defining what is inside a particular set of data. In particular, open coding is the first phase of coding that tries to identify general categories. Next, axial coding is the second coding phase that compiles similar categories into one category. Lastly, selective coding is the final coding stage where categories are meticulously selected to determine the core categories (S. G. Sukur, personal communication, April 1, 2021). Usually, the supervisor will check the data from the selective coding to do "the expert review" for the findings (Bandur, 2019). Lastly, the NVivo 12 Plus software was used to process the data correctly (Llinas et al., 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the dominant myths and counter-myths identified in the three Indonesian horror movies will be explained textually and sociologically. Since Indonesia is a very vast country with a multitude of popular cultures, various political ethics and dynamics, and many social imaginations, some experts believe that there is a connection between Indonesian popular culture, including movies (the micro-level analysis), and the country's sociological aspects (the macro-level analysis) (Fox, 2020). The explanation will be divided into the three sub-sections that follow.

The semiotic analysis of the dominant myths (the micro-level analysis)

The first research question of this study is: what forms of dominant myths are portrayed in the three selected Indonesian horror movies? Two general forms of the dominant myths that correlate semiotically are Islamic teachings and family values. Moreover, the Islamic teaching references are also found integrated into *Pengabdi Setan* and *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*. The data analysis shows that Islamic teachings obtained eight references, whereas family values garnered six references.

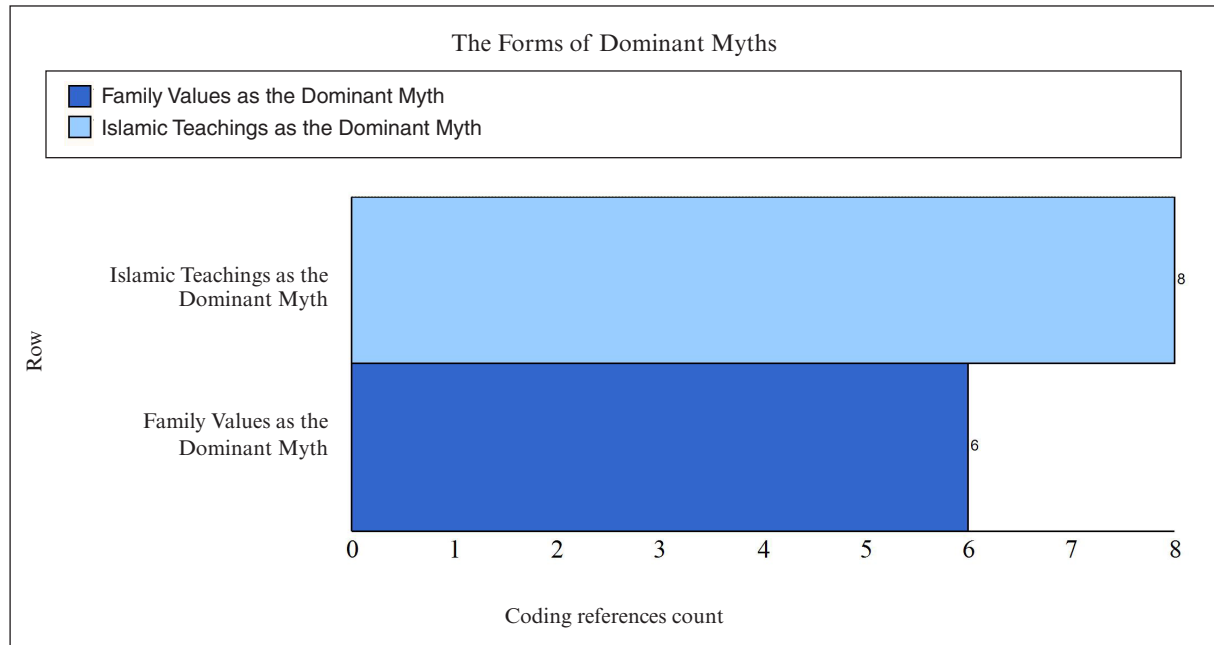


Figure 2. The forms of dominant myths

Specifically, the first Islamic teaching reference can be seen in *Pengabdi Setan* that show denotatively chantings of prayer by the people who attend Rini's mother's burial and the family members who chant praises for the Almighty God in Rini's house. Connotatively, the size of the picture taken is a long shot, and it can be inferred that the event is attended by people who have a public relationship (neighbour relationship). Besides that, it can also be inferred that the burial is done in an Islamic way since the prayer chanting is also done in an Islamic way in order to ease the dead person into the *Barzakh* realm — although the father, who is not a good Muslim, seems not too enthusiastic to take part in the ceremony. Figure 3 show these scenes (from 20:55 to 21:24) (Anwar, 2017).

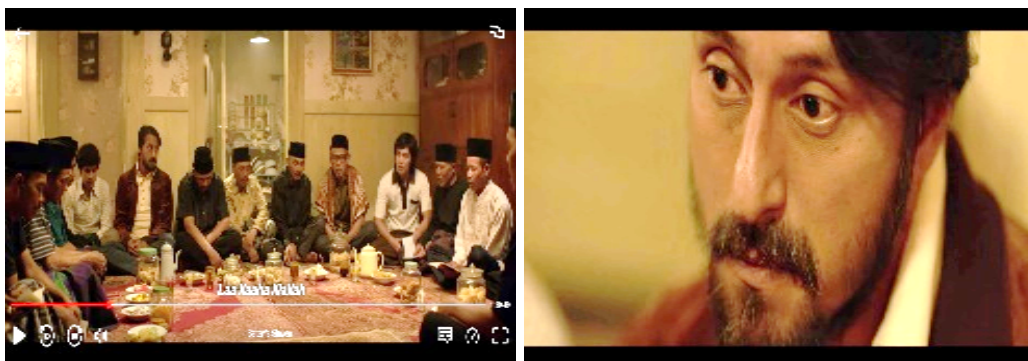


Figure 3. The chanting of prayers in the house

Furthermore, the second Islamic teaching reference can be found in the scenes in *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*, which show Satria inviting Suzanna to do morning prayers with the congregation at the mosque. However, Suzanna refuses, but she asks Satria to go on without her. Connotatively, the white dress that Suzanna wears symbolises that she is purely a demon who wants to take revenge on those who killed her and her baby. On the contrary, the green shirt worn by Satria shows that Satria is a religious person. The size of the picture is a medium shot, and it tells us that there is a personal relationship between Satria and Suzanna. The refusal of Suzanna to do the morning prayer denotes that prayers can defeat a demon. However, there is a reconciliation between two opposite things. Although Suzanna asks her husband to pray at the mosque, she remains in the form of the demon and stays in the human realm. Therefore, the scenes represent a dominant myth that the five prayer times can effectively defeat a demon. Figure 4 shows these scenes (from 1:19:36 to 1:20:40) (Umbara, 2018).

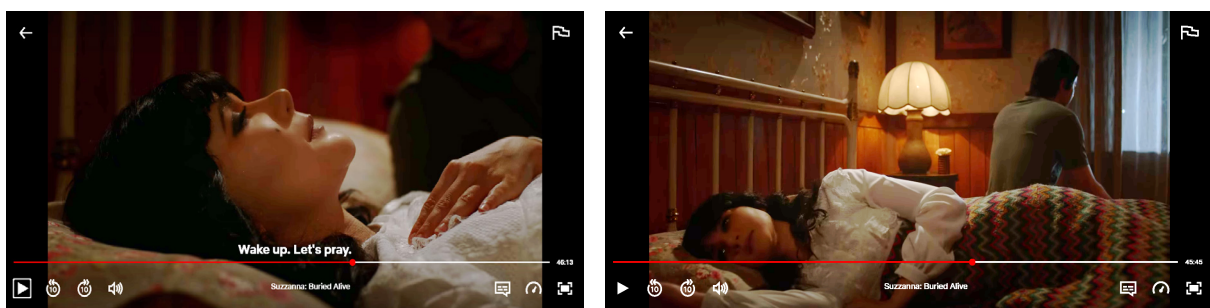


Figure 4. Suzanna refusing to do the morning prayer

The third Islamic reference can be seen in the scenes of *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*, which show denotatively Suzanna screaming and revolting when Satria reads the scriptures of the Quran in front of her. Connotatively, the white dress that Suzanna wears symbolises that she is purely a demon who wants to take revenge on those who killed her and her baby. Moreover, when Suzanna takes off her *mukena* (prayer robe) and runs away, this shows that reading the scriptures of the Quran can effectively hurt a demon, no matter how strong it is. Yet, there is a reconciliation depicted in these scenes. Even though Suzanna is harmed when Satria reads the Quran, Suzanna, in the form of a demon, still stays in the human realm. Therefore, it creates the dominant myth that the scriptures of the Quran are able to defeat the strongest demon completely (Gibraltar et al., 2023). These scenes (from 1:29:14 to 1:29:37) are shown in Figure 5 (Umbara, 2018).

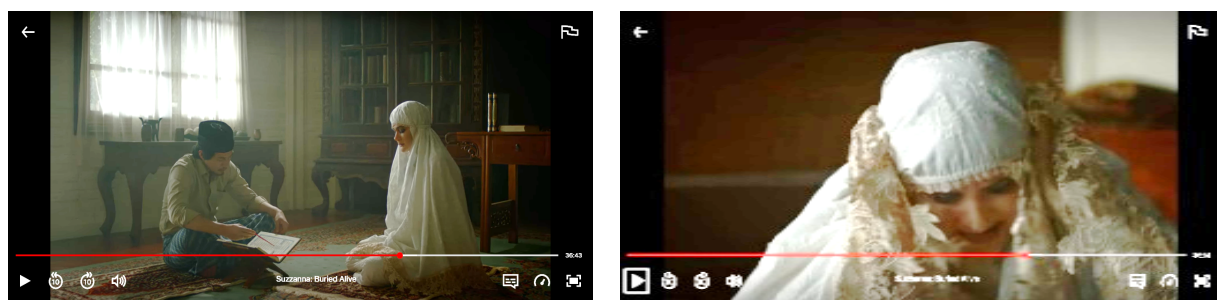


Figure 5. Suzanna screaming and revolting

On the other hand, family values can also be seen integrated into *Pengabdian Setan* and *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1*. The fourth reference of the dominant myth that contains family values is the scenes in *Pengabdian Setan*, which show denotatively Rini, Bondi, Ian, and Tony eating together at the dinner table. At that time, Rini asks Bondi to join the family and forbids Ian from leaving the dinner table. Connotatively, the close-up size describes the personal relationship between Rini and other family members like Bondi, Ian, and Tony. Similarly, the medium shot size insinuates that there is a personal relationship among them. Also, the white dress worn by Rini signifies that she really wants to keep the strong ties among family members. In fact, Ian wants to leave the dinner table because he is afraid of Bondi, but Rini stops him. As a result, the scene portrays the dominant myth that as long as the family loves each other, the demon or the Satanist sect cannot separate them easily. Figure 6 shows these scenes (from 47:32 to 48:10) (Anwar, 2017).

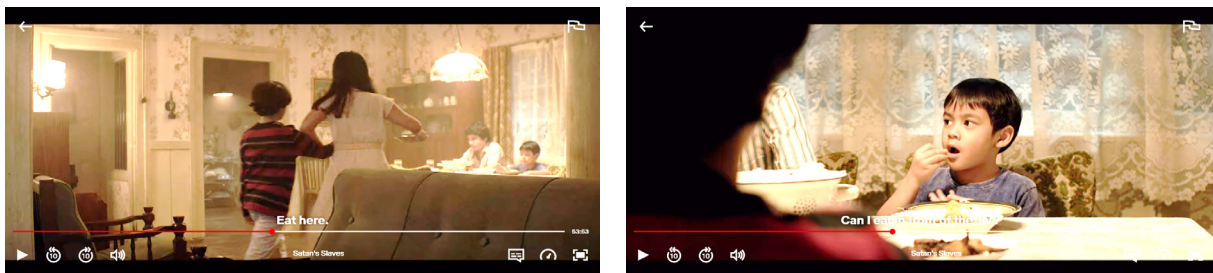


Figure 6. Rini asking her siblings to eat together

Similarly, the fifth reference that portrays family values are the scenes in *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1*, which show denotatively Nara saving Alfie from the grave hole by giving her hand to help Alfie climb out of the hole. Connotatively, the size of picture 1 is a *close-up*, which symbolises the intimate relationship between Nara and Alfie as sisters. In addition, scene 2 is a medium shot, which means there is a personal relationship between Alfie and Nara. Therefore, the scenes portray the dominant myth that even though Alfie and Nara are non-biological siblings from their mother's side, they love and protect each other. Figure 7 shows these scenes (from 1:46:00 to 1:47:07) (Tjahjanto, 2018).

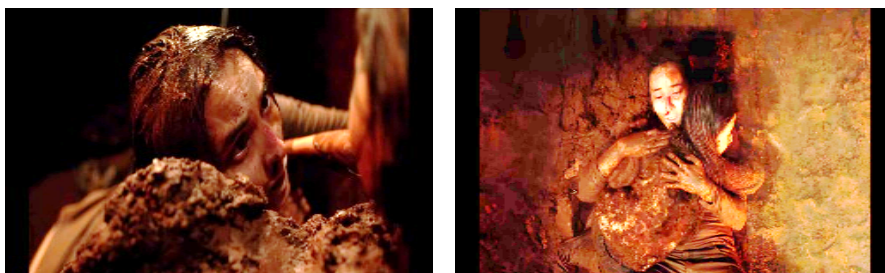


Figure 7. Nara saving Alfie from the grave

Based on the data analysis (answers for the first research question), the scenes that position Islamic teachings as the dominant myth obtained five references; the scenes that show that Islamic teachings can defeat the demon garnered five references; the scenes that support family values obtained five references; and the scenes that show the dialectical reconciliation of the two opposite myths obtained five references. Figure 8 presents a visualisation of this data analysis.

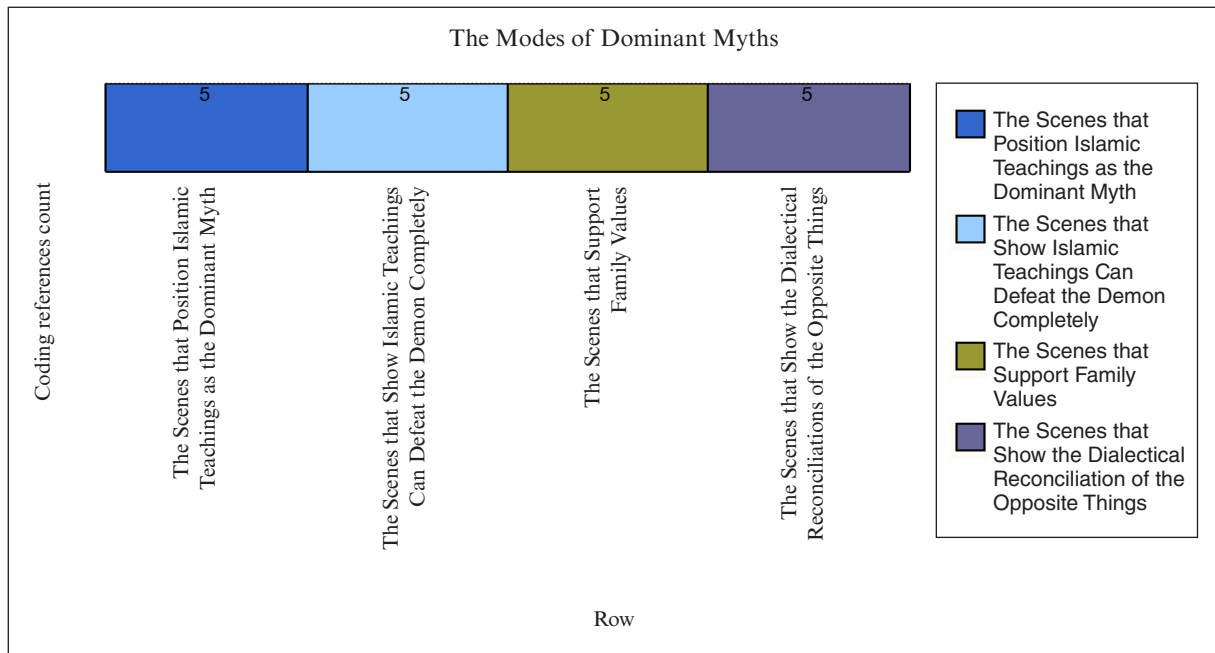


Figure 8. The modes of dominant myths

The semiotic analysis of the counter-myths (the micro-level analysis)

The next research question that must be answered is: what references of counter-myths are presented in the selected Indonesian horror movies? However, it should be noted that it is impossible to explain all the references of counter-myths in these horror movies in this one article since there are too many of them. Therefore, only five have been selected for discussion.

The first reference is the scenes that show demons can attack people in the human world, which is depicted denotatively in *Pengabdian Setan*, where Rini tries to do her prayers by wearing the *mukena* that covers all of her body. Suddenly, the demon shows itself to Rini and harasses her after she completes her prayers. Connotatively, both scenes depict the close-up measure, which suggests there are intimate problems between the demon and Rini. The white *mukena* implies Rini’s desire to ask for help from God. In addition, the white makeup shows that the demon is purely a demon and no other creature. Also, the scenes portray that the full scale of the demon’s attack, without any obstacles or barriers, which means Rini’s prayer did not affect the demon at all. Therefore, these scenes (from 1:04:09 to 1:05:30) suggest the counter-myth that prayers are not effective in defeating demons. Figure 9 shows these scenes (Anwar, 2017).

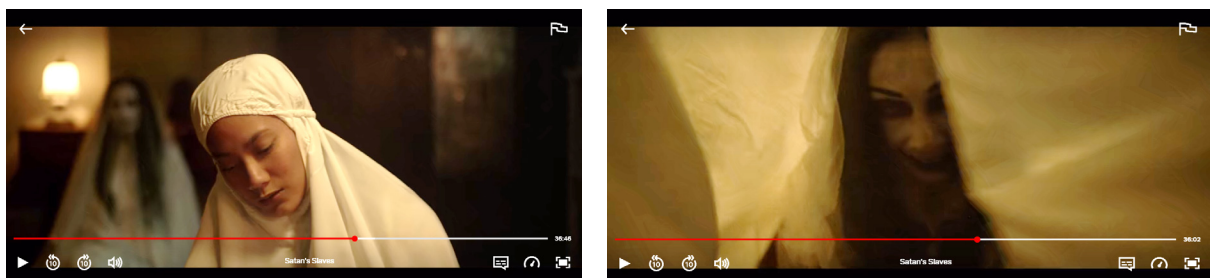


Figure 9. Rini is praying, but she is attacked by the demon

The second reference is that the soul of a dead person can come back to the human realm. This can be seen in *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*, in the scenes that show denotatively how Suzanna transforms into *Sundel Bolong*, and in the scenes that show Suzanna being shocked when she realises that she has transformed into *Sundel Bolong*, after checking the hole in her back meticulously. Connotatively, the scenes show that Suzanna is shocked purely because she realises that she has transformed into *Sundel Bolong* accidentally. Also, the white dress worn by Suzanna represents that she is a pure demon since she has undergone a double death. Furthermore, these scenes represent the counter-myth that the soul of a dead person (Suzanna) can come back to the human realm and transform into *Sundel Bolong* due to the double deaths of herself and the baby in her womb. These are the scenes (from 36:57 to 37:14) (Figure 10) (Umbara, 2018).

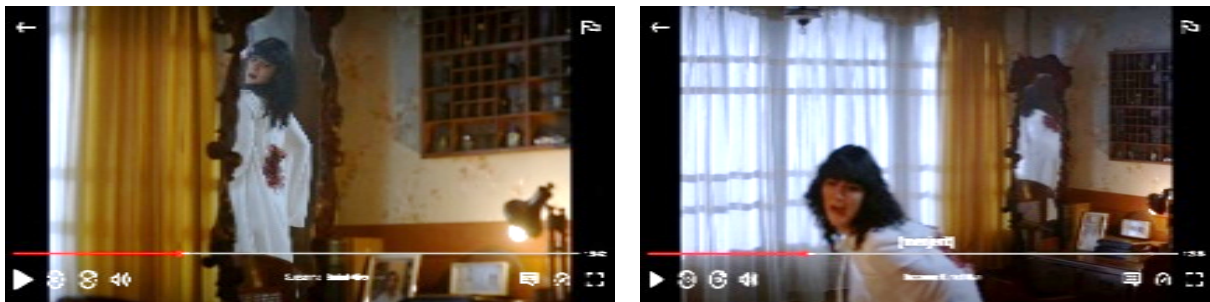


Figure 10. Suzanna transforming into *Sundel Bolong*

The third reference is that there are several supernatural ways to weaken a demon's power, as shown in the scenes in *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur*. The scenes show denotatively Mbah Turu paralyzing Suzanna by using a combination of spell and stabbing a dagger into her head. Connotatively, the scenes portray personal revenge between Suzanna and Mbah Turu as well as personal revenge between Suzanna and Jonal. Furthermore, the white dress worn by Suzanna represents that she is a pure demon. Implicitly, the scenes show that the combination of dagger and spells can paralyze *Sundel Bolong* effectively. In fact, it creates the counter-myth that the spell, read by the shaman, can hurt *Sundel Bolong* effectively, and the dagger, stabbed in the head, can paralyze *Sundel Bolong* successfully. Figure 11 shows the scenes (from 1:36:45 to 1:37:26) (Umbara, 2018).



Figure 11. Suzanna being paralyzsed by Mbah Turu

The fourth reference of the counter-myth can be seen in the scenes that show that the demon can become a hero. Specifically, these scenes can be seen very clearly in *Pengabdi*

Setan, where the grandmother ghost tries to protect the family from being ambushed by a living corpse by barricading the door so that family members can escape from the house safely. Connotatively, the size of the picture is a close-up, which means there is intimacy between the grandmother ghost and the other family members. In addition, the object (the grandmother ghost) is presented bigger than the surroundings, which means the grandmother's action in saving the family member is important. Therefore, these scenes produce the counter-myth that the grandmother ghost becomes the hero or saviour of the family (from 1:37:02 to 1:37:20) (Figure 12) (Anwar, 2017).

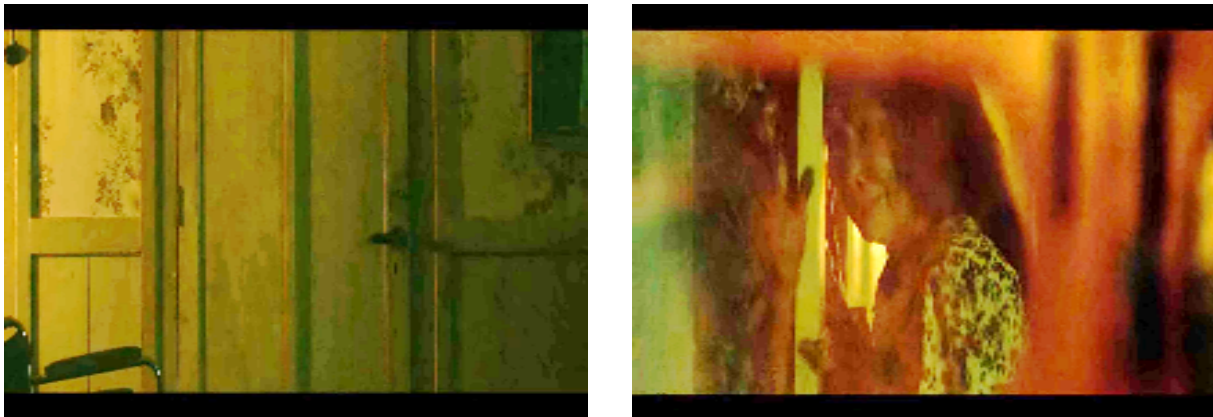


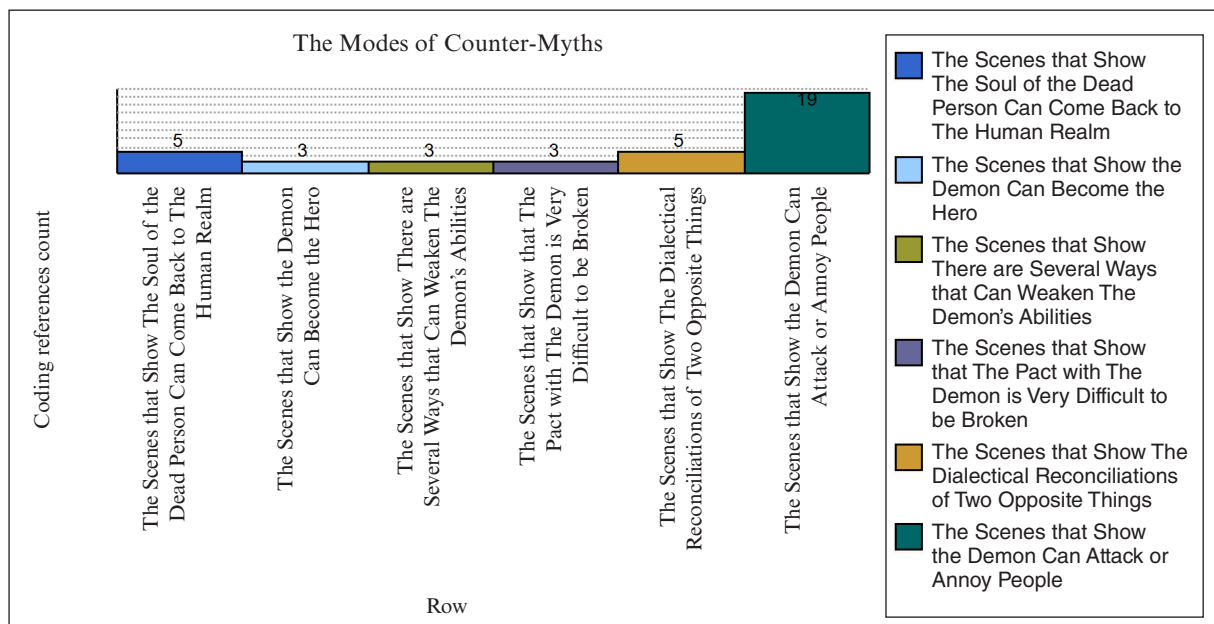
Figure 12. The grandmother ghost barricading the door to save the family members

The fifth reference shows that the pact with a demon is very difficult to be broken. This is reflected denotatively in the scenes of *Sebelum Iblis Menjemput Ayat 1*, where Lesmana encounters the priestess in the wardrobe and says that he cannot sacrifice his biological daughter, Alfie, as a victim to the demon. Next, when the priestess mocks Lesmana by remarking that he could sacrifice his wife in the past, he gives false hair (does not belong to Alfie) to the priestess, but she realizes Lesmana's trick. In the heat of the moment, Lesmana takes a dagger and stabs it into the priestess's chest and the priestess curses him, saying that he will lose all his richness. Finally, he decides to end her life. Connotatively, the scenes imply that there is a personal problem between Lesmana and the priestess. Further, the scenes represent the reconciliation between dominant myths and counter-myths, since Lesmana tries to reconcile between defending his biological daughter and sacrificing his first wife, as he is overwhelmed by his regret. Therefore, the scenes reference the dominant myth that, as bad as a father may be, he will not have the heart to sacrifice his own biological daughter to achieve his personal goal. Figure 13 presents these scenes (from 1:30:24 to 1:33:30) (Tjahjanto, 2018).



Figure 13. Lesmana killing the priestess

In answering the second research question, the analysis results show that a demon attacking or harrassing people in the human realm received 19 references. Second, the soul of a dead person can come back to the human realm obtained five references. Third, scenes that show the dialectical reconciliation of the two opposite things obtained five references. Fourth, a demon that can become a hero gained three references. Next, scenes that show there are several ways to weaken demons obtained three references. Lastly, the scenes that portray that the pact with demons is very difficult to break obtained three references. The visualisation of these findings are presented in Figure 14.



Figures 14. The modes of counter-myths

The sociological reflections (macro-level analysis)

The discussion above shows the comprehensive semiotic analysis of three Indonesian horror movies, not only at the denotative level but also at the connotative level. In addition, there are sociological reflections that can be extracted since the cinema is a critical cultural industry that reminds a society of the good path that it should follow (Abu Hassan et al., 2023).

Therefore, from the examination of the first research question (RQ 1) and the second research question (RQ 2), it can be observed that there is a prevailing trend where some Indonesians adopt two kinds of dialectical reconciliations sociologically since there is a dynamic interplay between the dominant myths and the counter-myths that exist. Simply put, these reconciliations can be dubbed as *Ibadah Terus Maksiat Jalan (ITMJ)* (pray continuously, but at the same time, do things that contradict the Islamic teachings). Moreover, several scenes from the selected movies reflect this trend clearly. For example, the scenes where Hendra tells Rini and Tony about the supernatural creatures that are more powerful than humans and djinn in *Pengabdian Setan* (Anwar, 2017) or the scenes that show the ghost of Suzanna asking her husband to go for the morning prayer at the mosque in *Suzanna: Bernapas Dalam Kubur* (Umbara, 2018). Particularly, these scenes reflect the dialectical reconciliations between the dominant myths and the counter-myths in the Indonesian society.

Interestingly, there are examples where counter-myths and dominant myths break each other in the Indonesian society, like the renunciation of shamanism by one of Indonesia's most famous shamans recently, to become a religious person (*orang soleh*) (the dominant myth breaks the counter-myth). However, such occurrences are rare. It should be noted that the trend of *ITMJ* (pray continuously but at the same time, do things that contradict Islamic teachings) involves only some Indonesian Muslims, and not everyone.

The first dialectical reconciliation (*ITMJ*) that can be seen taking place in the Indonesian society concerns some Indonesian Muslims who adhere to Islamic teachings but practise witchcraft (reconciliation type 1). Concretely, there is "a division of labors" between worshipping the Almighty God and practising witchcraft, as both actions can be done simultaneously. For formal worship purposes, several Indonesians worship the Almighty God, but at the same time, for daily purposes, they practise witchcraft.

Moreover, those who adopt this outlook are varied, including prominent Indonesians as well as regular Indonesians. On several occasions, they make a pact with the demon with the help of the shamans as mediators. Commonly, the supernatural abilities of shamans are hereditary. This means someone becomes a shaman if his or her ancestors were shamans. When the shamans are hired as mediators with the demon, the demon will demand several conditions to the person summoning through the shaman. As a matter of fact, not all pacts with the demon require the sacrifice of close family members; in exchange, this can be replaced with the sacrifice of a black chicken, offerings of specific fruits, *puasa mutih* (a type of fasting that requires the person fasting to break the fasting with white substances such as rice and mineral water), and bathing at seven different rivers with seven different springs. However, there are other rituals in Indonesia that require family members to be sacrificed to the demon, sexual intercourses with strangers several times or sacrifice of a black goat. Further, the locations of *Pesugihan* (allying with the demon for financial gains) and other witchcraft practices can be varied in Indonesia, including sites like the sanctuary *Puri Cepuri*, Kemukus Mountain, and the tomb of *Roro Mendut* (Gottowick, 2018).

The second dialectical reconciliation (*ITMJ*) adopted by Indonesians is the reconciliation between Islamic teachings and supernatural belief (animism and dynamism) (reconciliation type 2). Specifically, there is a trend where some Indonesians worship the Almighty God routinely but at the same time, they still believe in supernatural beliefs (animism and dynamism). Speaking of animism, it correlates with the belief in the existence of supernatural creatures, like *Kanjeng Ratu Kidul* (leader of the southern sea of Java Island) (Strassler, 2014) and *Wok* (female ghost from Borneo Island) (Herrmans, 2020). Similarly, dynamism refers to the belief in things that have supernatural abilities. In fact, some Indonesians believe that spirits or demons can possess certain things to help humans (dynamism). These supernatural things can take the shape of supernatural receptacles, like the *Nini Towong Doll*, which can predict something after a demon possesses it, and *Jailangkung*, the male doll, which can help people communicate with demons (Chan, 2017). Also, dynamism can be manifested as amulets in the form of daggers (*keris*), which are believed by some to be occupied by supernatural creatures; the daggers can help their owners in their daily lives. Amulets can also take the form of things used in daily life, like a pen, which helps its user smooth out signed contracts.

Furthermore, according to the semiotic examination, there are two motives that stimulate people to prioritise counter-myths over dominant myths. First of all, people adopt them for economic motives; they need the money or want to become rich instantly. Second, for sexual desires, for instance, *pelet* (black magic from Indonesia that is used to attract the opposite sex) or indulging in sexual intercourse to feed demons supernaturally. In contrast, there are two motives that compel people to prioritise dominant myths over

counter-myths. First, they prioritise the dominant myth for safety reasons. Second, they select the dominant myth over counter-myth due to regret when they realise the big mistake of allying with the demon.

At times, there is a correlation between reconciliation type 1 and reconciliation type 2. If locals in an area believe in supernatural entities, they will worship them, and they will practise witchcraft by allying with these entities. For instance, there is a belief that if people on Java Island want to obtain a political position, they can worship *Kanjeng Ratu Kidul*. On the other hand, if someone wishes to gain instant richness, they can worship *Nyi Blorong* (the half-human, half-female supernatural creature in the form of a big snake from Java Island). In other words, there is “the division of labours” in the system of Indonesian occultism. Yet, there is a decreasing trend for both reconciliation types, thanks to Indonesia’s rapid technological development and modernisation. For instance, now, many do not need to practise witchcraft and supernatural beliefs (animism and dynamism) to succeed in business since they can promote their products on social media. However, there are several places in Indonesia whose inhabitants still believe, practise, and worship supernatural things, particularly in remote areas or areas that have not been touched by development.

This sociological tendency is supported by the study’s data analysis. Particularly, the dialectical reconciliation between Islamic teachings and supernatural beliefs garnered 10 references, while the dialectical reconciliation between Islamic teachings and witchcraft obtained six references. Figure 15 presents a visualization of the findings.

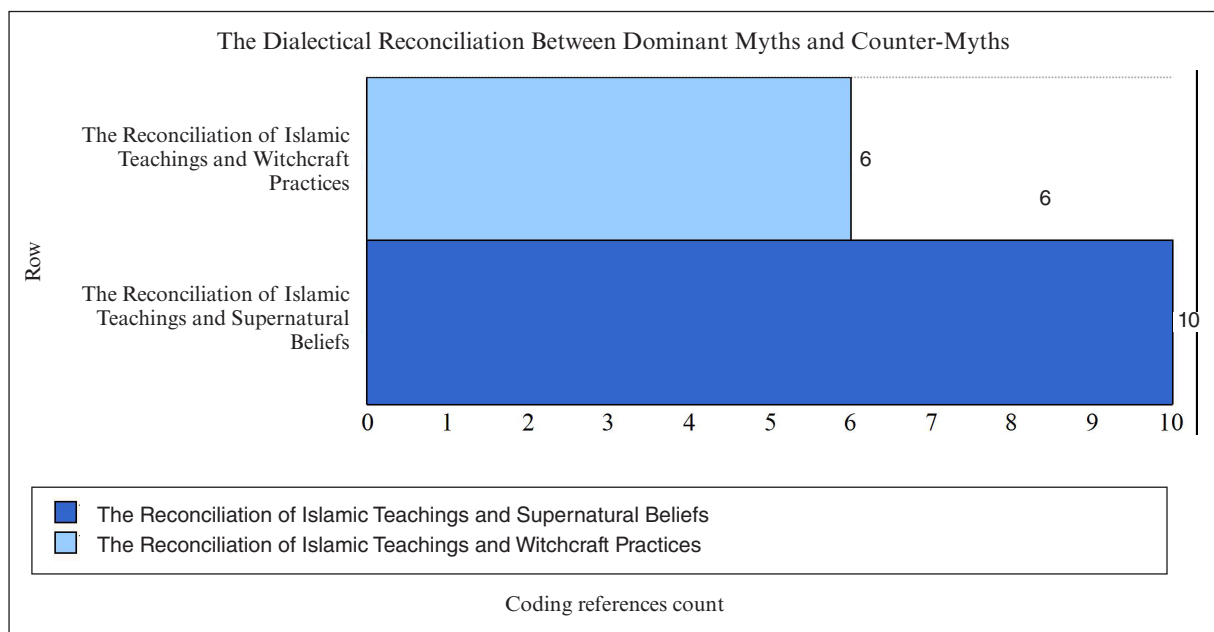


Figure 15. The dialectical reconciliation between dominant myth and counter-myths

Figure 16 presents the motives that compel some to prioritise dominant myths over counter-myths : safety (with two references) and regret (with two references) while Figure 17 presents the motives that compel others to choose counter-myths over dominant myths: economic (with three references) and sexual pleasure (with four references).

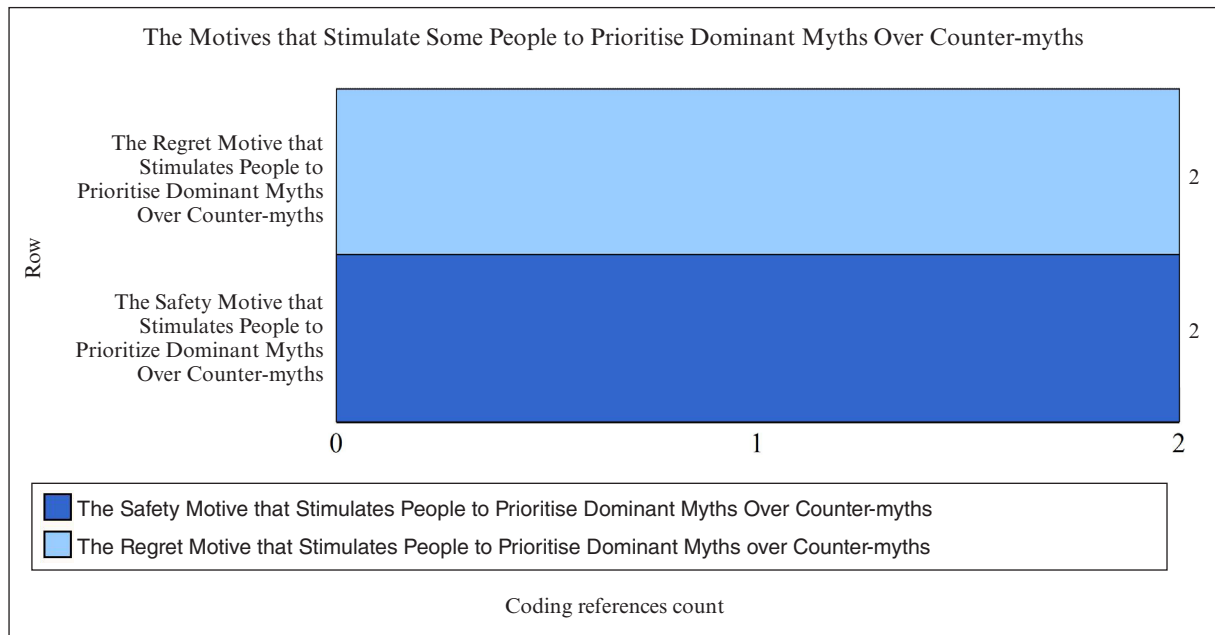


Figure 16. Motives that compel some to prioritise dominant myths over counter-myths

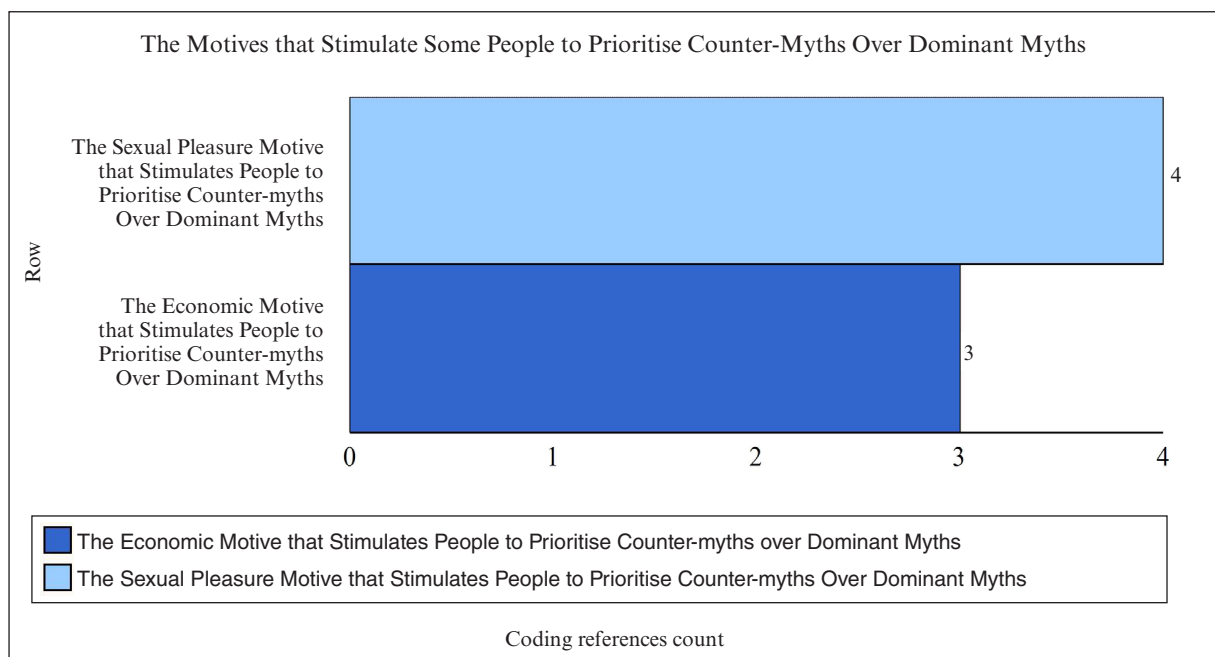


Figure 17. Motives that compel some to prioritise counter-myths over dominant myths

CONCLUSION

Indonesia has a very good cultural environment, particularly for the developing horror film industry, because this country has an abundance of unexplored myths and sinister stories (counter-myths). However, Indonesians still uphold Islamic teachings since most Indonesians are Muslims. At the same time, some (not all Indonesian Muslims) can be religious (still uphold the dominant myths) and engage in supernaturalism by practising

witchcraft, using shamans as mediators (reconciliation type 1), as well as believe in supernatural beliefs (animism and dynamism), including in supernatural creatures and using amulets for specific purposes (reconciliation type 2). Apart from that, these dialectical reconciliations show that the dominant myths and the counter-myths enjoy equal status in the Indonesian society. Moreover, some prefer counter-myths if they want instant success or richness and want to fulfil their sexual desires. In the same way, others choose the dominant myths over counter-myths to guarantee their safety, and as repentance for believing in counter-myths in the past.

Theoretically, the present study perfects the conventional Barthes' semiotic theory by enlarging its scope to cover not only dominant myths but also counter-myths (the perfection of the first theoretical gap) and criticises Reid's decolonial project since it proves that it is not necessary to counter dominant myths anymore since both myths sometimes reconcile dialectically (the perfection of the second theoretical gap). As these trends occur in the Indonesian society sociologically, the Indonesian audience can probably accept the idea of Postmillennial Gothic (the idea of beautifying and rehabilitating the character of a ghost or demon) (Browning, 2018), because they are able to reconcile the concept of supernatural ideas (like witchcraft, animism, and dynamism) with religious teachings. Therefore, it would be fascinating if the Postmillennial Gothic can be integrated into Indonesian movies in a new form that shows Indonesian demon characters punishing criminals (including corruptors) and avenging injustice. These demons, beautified and rehabilitated, can be portrayed as heroes or heroines. Consequently, this approach can affect society by encouraging tolerance and inculcating the idea that criminal behaviours (including corrupt practices) are detrimental to the society.

Since movies are a source of entertainment in this century, a widely held assumption is that movies can play a significant role as an agent of socialisation to fight harmful traditions and social practices so that the society can move forward (Maheendran, 2017). At the same time, the application of Postmillennial Gothic in Indonesian movies carries the function of preserving arts and cultural heritage in a creative format (Abdul Latif & Abu Hassan, 2020). In other words, movies have cultural and social functions.

Since the Indonesian film industry still lacks film models (Glenn & Tompi, 2019), the authors believe that film studies can make a significant contribution to society by implementing a new film model without insulting any of the religions in Indonesia. The reason is that the findings enlarge the semiotic approach from its conventional roles into a tool that can map the latest sociological trends that takes place in a country theoretically, and that is the novelty of this study. Moreover, the findings can be used to produce a new film model that can cultivate tolerance in a society in a practical manner, since the artworks can be used to entertain and to teach the audience about good values (Mohd et al., 2023). Therefore, for future studies, it is important to examine Indonesia's unexplored myths (counter-myths) in the form of folklore and sinister stories and use the findings to develop film models to enrich the stock of film models for the positive development of the Indonesian film industry.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest in the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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