

Acculturation of Western and Local Occult Symbols in the Film *Pengabdi Satan 2: Communion* (Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes)

Fauzi Taufik Rabani¹, Twin Agus Pramonojati², Rizca Haqqu³

^{1, 2, 3}Communication Science Study Program, Faculty of Communication and Social Sciences, Telkom University, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: rizcahaqqu@telkomuniversity.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the form and meaning of the acculturation of Western and local occult symbols in the Indonesian horror film *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion*. As national cinema evolves, the horror genre has transformed from merely exploiting local myths to complex narratives integrating global occult elements. This research employs a qualitative method with Roland Barthes semiotic approach to dissect the layers of denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in the film's scenes, characters, and properties. The analysis results indicate strong symbolic hybridization, where Western occult artifacts such as the *Ouroboros* and *Satanic Cross* are recontextualized alongside local entities like *pocong* and *pesugihan* practices. Main findings reveal that these symbols are not merely visual elements but function to build a new myth about the universality of terror. The talisman symbol shifts function into a communication medium, while local ghost figures are placed within an international cult ritual structure. In conclusion, this film represents a cultural acculturation that successfully creates a relevant horror atmosphere, asserting that occult practices in modern cinema serve as a cultural communication bridge binding its adherents in an endless cycle of sacrifice, while reflecting the adaptive dynamics of Indonesian societal beliefs toward external influences.

Keywords: Horror Film, Roland Barthes Semiotics, Cultural Acculturation, Occult Symbols, *Pengabdi Setan 2*.

Introduction

The development of communication technology has encouraged the media to play an increasingly significant role in human life. The media not only functions as a means of entertainment, but also as a vehicle for conveying messages, representing social reality, and shaping people's views on the world. Among various forms of media, film occupies a strategic position because of its ability to combine visual and audio

elements simultaneously, so that the message conveyed can be received more intensely and emotionally by the audience. Film is an audio-visual medium used to convey messages to a group of people, as well as reflect the social reality that develops in society (Tombu, 2024). In the Indonesian context, film is considered a very effective communication medium because of the high public interest in audio-visual based media compared to print or audio media (Wardhani, 2025)

Films not only capture social reality, but also project it back to society through certain narratives, symbols, and visual representations. This process makes films have the ideological power to influence, even shape the way of thinking and the point of view of the audience (Gogoi, 2022). Therefore, films are often used as a medium of propaganda, social experiments, and objects of academic study. Both documentary and fiction films, although they have different approaches, basically have the same goal, which is to convey a message to the audience (Margineanu, 2023). In fictional films, the message is packaged through various genres, such as comedy, drama, thriller, horror, and action. Among these genres, horror films show a very strong appeal in Indonesia, as evidenced by the dominance of horror films in the list of national best-selling films (Yoesoef, 2015).

Data shows that horror films are the most popular genre by Indonesian people (Tionardus & Pangerang, 2022). The success of films such as *KKN Desa Penari*, *Pengabdi Setan* (2017), dan *Suzzanna: Bernafas dalam Kubur* emphasizing that horror is not only in demand as entertainment, but also as a medium that is able to touch the psychological and cultural dimensions of the audience. Horror films are generally designed to evoke negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and discomfort through the exploration of supernatural, mystical, and dark symbols. In the 2000s, Indonesian horror films often raised the theme of ghosts and local folklore, such as *Hantu Jeruk Purut* (2006) dan *Hantu Jembatan Ancol* (2008). However, further developments show a shift in the horror formula towards the exploration of more complex themes.

This shift is evident through the emergence of films *Pengabdi Setan* (2017) Works Joko Anwar which introduces the occult element more prominently. Occultism, which comes from the Latin word *occultus*, is interpreted as something hidden, dark, and mysterious. Occultism is an understanding or belief in the supernatural world that involves certain ritual practices with a specific purpose (Nugroho, 2022). This element was previously more common in Western horror films, but in *Pengabdi Setan* and its sequels, *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* (2022), occultism is presented in the context of Indonesian culture. Success *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion*, which reached more than six million viewers and became the first film in Southeast Asia to use IMAX technology, demonstrating the high public acceptance of the occult-based approach to horror.

This phenomenon indicates the acculturation process of Western and local occult symbols in Indonesian horror films. The acculturation refers to the combination

of global occult symbols, practices, and ideologies with elements of local beliefs and culture, thus resulting in a new meaning that is closer to the experience of Indonesian people (Tiwahyupriadi & Ayuningtyas, 2020). This process is inseparable from Indonesia's long history of interaction with foreign cultures, especially during the colonial period, which introduced various foreign mystical symbols and practices. In the movie *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion*, Occult symbols not only serve as aesthetic elements or tension-triggers, but also as a system of signs that are interconnected and construct a particular ideological narrative.

The urgency of this research lies in the lack of studies that specifically discuss the acculturation of Western and local occult symbols in contemporary Indonesian horror films, especially through a semiotic approach. A number of previous studies have tended to focus horror film analysis on narrative aspects, audience reception, or representations of local ghosts and myths, without examining in depth how occult symbols are constructed and interpreted in the context of hybrid Indonesian culture (Kurniawan & Santabudi, 2023; M. E. Prasetyo et al., 2024; Sutandio, 2023). Thus, there is a research gap in understanding how occult symbols in modern horror films function as a medium of cultural and ideological communication.

State of the art research puts the film *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* as an object of study that represents a new phase of Indonesian horror films, namely the integration of the global and local occult in a single visual narrative. The film presents ritual, space, sound, and visual symbols that refer to Western occult practices, but are contextualized in an Indonesian social setting. To uncover the meaning behind these symbols, this research is based on semiotic theory, specifically Roland Barthes' semiotic model (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). Film is a complex system of signs, in which images, sounds, dialogue, and music work simultaneously to produce meaning.

Roland Barthes' semiotics offers a framework of analysis that includes three levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of a sign, connotation relates to implicit meaning influenced by the cultural context, while myth serves as a system of ideological meaning that is accepted as social truth. This approach is relevant for analyzing occult symbols in films, since they are not only present as visual representations, but also carry certain ideological and cultural content (Dirgantara, 2024; Urfan, 2019)

Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method. The research data was obtained through observation of scenes, dialogues, and visual elements in the film *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* which contains occult symbols. The analysis was carried out by identifying the denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings produced from these symbols. Based on this description, the formulation of the problem in this study is how the occult symbols in the film *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* interpreted at the level of denotation; how the symbols are interpreted at the level of connotation; and what myths are constructed through the acculturation of Western and local occult symbols in the

film. By answering the formulation of this problem, the research is expected to make a theoretical and empirical contribution to the study of communication, especially in the study of film, semiotics, and popular culture.

Literature Review

Movies and Horror Genre Dynamics

Film is defined by KBBI as a celluloid membrane or live picture play, which is the oldest mass communication medium that functions effectively in conveying messages and reflecting social reality (Suryanto & Amri, 2018). Protected by Law No.8 of 1992, films are classified into three main types: documentary, fiction, and experimental, which are built through the integration of cinematic and narrative elements (Ferdinanda, 2023). In its development in Indonesia, the trend of films continues to evolve, especially the horror genre that shows significant dynamics ranging from the dominance of mystical themes of local legends, which was displaced by adult elements in the early 2000s, until finally rediscovering its original identity since 2017 with a focus on gripping atmospheres and qualified production quality (Setiawan & Halim, 2023).

The revival of the quality of this horror genre is strongly represented in the film *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* (2022) Works Joko Anwar. As a sequel that continues the story of the Suwono family's terror in a flat, this film not only set a commercial record with more than 6 million viewers, but also achieved critical acclaim for its ability to combine elements of religious horror and the occult with a solid narrative (Iktia, 2018). The success of this film proves that the advancement of Indonesian film techniques is now able to compete in creating a complete viewing experience, as well as building the audience's sensitivity to social phenomena through cinema media.

Cultural Acculturation and Symbolism

Acculturation is a dynamic process of meeting two or more cultures that influence each other, in which foreign elements are selectively absorbed into the recipient's culture without losing their original identity. This process occurs both at the group level and individuals who adopt new values that have a significant impact on changing social interaction methods and people's mentality to become more open. The acculturation process in Indonesian horror films also reflects how the symbolism of local culture is integrated, giving a deeper meaning to the narratives and characters shown (Roszi & Mutia, 2018).

In these cultural dynamics, symbols are present as an important element in the meaning of reality. Etymologically derived from the word *sym-ballein*, a symbol is defined as a sign that involves deep interpretation and is not separate from its associative context. Symbols are classified into three main categories: universal symbols that are understood across cultures, cultural symbols that are closely tied to

the background of certain traditions such as the Keris in Java, and individual symbols that are the personal expression of a creator of the work (Fauziyah et al., 2024).

Western Occultism and Symbolism

Western occultism, which comes from the word *occult* (hidden), refers to the belief in secret or supernatural things that include the practice of communication with spirits, divination, and magic (Nugroho, 2022). Over time, this phenomenon evolved from an ancient ritual into a modern movement influenced by the *New Age* and even evolved into a global commercial industry. This phenomenon of Western occultism can also be seen in Indonesian horror films, where supernatural elements are often combined with local myths and traditions, creating a complex layer of meaning in the narrative. (Kurniawan & Santabudi, 2023) The combination of occult elements with local traditions gives a unique feel to Indonesian horror films, enriching the viewer's experience and creating dialogue between different cultures.

In practice, Western occultism relies heavily on the use of symbols as esoteric means of communication and representations of metaphysical principles. Iconic symbols such as the Pentagram which symbolizes protection, as well as the Baphomet which represents the duality of the balance of the universe, are often used both in spiritual contexts and by certain groups such as *the Church of Satan* (Markéta Muczková, 2023). In addition to graphic symbols, physical objects such as *talismans* (amulets), candles, and *Pentacles* also play a vital role as a medium of energy distribution to interact with supernatural forces (Collura, 2023). In the context of Indonesian horror films, the use of local cultural symbols and Western occult elements creates a narrative that is rich in meaning and social reflection.

Local Occultism and Sacrificial Rituals

Local occultism in Indonesia is a spiritual paradigm that is clearly cultivated within the indigenous cultural environment, encompassing mysterious components such as amulets and involvement with supernatural entities rooted in animistic and dynamic traditions (Pradipta & Stark, 2025). Its affiliation with ancestral heritage is perpetuated, while its dominant attribute is the syncretic incorporation of indigenous belief systems and officially recognized religions. This phenomenon is often exemplified in the metamorphosis of sacred texts into charm, thus illustrating the resilience of the community in forging a functional hybrid spirituality that overcomes pragmatic demands such as therapeutic interventions or safeguards (Essien, 2013).

In practice, the local occult is manifested through various physical and metaphysical symbols that represent the spiritual and psychological values of the community. Heirlooms such as Keris and Offerings rituals serve as a medium of connection to the supernatural world, while ghostly figures such as Kuntilanak and Pocong occupy a strong symbolic position that reflects a collective fear of unnatural death or unfulfilled spiritual obligations. These symbols live in the consciousness of

society as a reminder of the thin boundaries between physical reality and the supernatural world, as well as the consequences of transgressing customary norms (Chia, 2025).

Another crucial element that accompanies this tradition is the sacrificial ritual, which serves to bridge the profane with the sacred and strengthen social solidarity. In the context of the specific occult, this ritual is often interpreted as an attempt to make a covenant with a supernatural entity, ranging from the burning of paper amulets to the provision of tumbal in the practice of pesugihan. At the heart of this ritual is the concept of *do ut des* or exchange, where sacrifice is considered the price to be paid to gain access to power or instant wealth from a higher power (Nwobodo, 2024).

Semiotics Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes' semiotics is an approach to sign analysis that emphasizes on how meaning is constructed in culture, especially through the concept of *two order signification* (Garlitz, 2015). The first stage called denotation is the literal or objective meaning of a sign, describing the direct relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* according to physical reality. The second stage is connotation, which involves the subjective, emotional, and ideological meanings attached to the sign by culture or society. Barthes identifies connotations as the operational domain of myth, that is, a communication system that transforms history or culture into something as if it were something natural (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). Myths in this view serve to perpetuate dominant ideologies and shape society's perspective on reality, often making social constructions appear as undeniable facts (Segal, 1999).

This process is particularly relevant in the context of Indonesian horror films, where the symbolism of local culture and occult practices interact to create a rich and complex narrative. Barthes' use of semiotics in the analysis of Indonesian horror films allows us to understand how cultural and occult symbols form a deeper meaning in the narrative, creating a richer viewing experience. By applying Barthes' semiotic approach, we can uncover how visual and narrative elements in Indonesian horror films interact to create a layered and reflective meaning of the local culture. (Muhammadiyah, 2025)

Method

This research uses the paradigm of structuralism initiated by Levi-Strauss as a philosophical foundation to dissect the structure of language and symbols in cultural phenomena, especially related to the acculturation of occult symbols in film *Pengabdian Setan 2: Communion* (Wibawa & Natalia, 2021). This film by Joko Anwar is the subject of research, while the main object focuses on the representation of occult symbols that reflect the practice of pesugihan through narrative and cinematic elements such as settings, props, and costumes. This research aims to identify the intercultural relationships and meanings constructed behind these symbols in the social reality of

society by looking at how human perception of reality is constructed by existing structures.

The main unit of analysis in this study is the pieces of scenes or *scenes* in films that specifically feature occult symbols, both local and non-local. Data collection was carried out through two main sources, namely primary data in the form of film visual material accessed through *the* official streaming platform Netflix, and secondary data that includes relevant book literature and scientific journals to strengthen the theoretical context (Sudarsono et al., 2021). The data was collected to dissect how cultural contact occurs and is represented visually in cinema, focusing on elements of characters, costumes, and storylines that contain symbolic content.

The data analysis process is carried out systematically using Roland Barthes' semiotics method which divides meaning into three stages of significance, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The analysis steps begin with a thorough observation of the film, segment of scenes, and dissect the meaning of symbols to see patterns of acculturation and acceptance of symbols at the community level (Dirgantara, 2024). In order to ensure the credibility and validity of the research results, the authors applied a data validity test through theoretical triangulation, in which the findings of the analysis were reconfirmed using the perspectives of acculturation theory, symbol theory, and occult theory to produce comprehensive and accountable conclusions (Noble & Heale, 2019). The results of this study are expected to provide new insights into how occult symbols are interpreted and understood in the cultural context of Indonesian society.

Results

The core of Roland Barthes' thought in semiotic theory lies in the concept of two orders of meaning, namely denotation and connotation. In Barthes' semiotic framework, denotation is understood as a meaning that is explicit, literal, and can be directly captured from a sign, thus becoming the first stage in the process of semiotic analysis. Chandler asserts that denotative meanings are generally accepted because they are at the most basic level of communication and are relatively free from subjective interpretation. Meanwhile, connotations refer to the process of forming additional meanings that arise through certain associations as well as symbolic values related to social and cultural contexts. Connotative meaning is not literal, but depends on subjective interpretations influenced by the individual's cultural background, moral values, and emotional experiences. Sobur added that at the connotation level, signs are often intertwined with mythical elements that function to represent and naturalize certain ideologies. Based on this theoretical framework, the author will next explain Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of the scenes in the film *Pengabdian Setan 2: Communion*.

Table 1. Scene 1: Pocong who gathers and prostrates







Signifier	Signified
 	<p>A group of pocong which is a ghostly figure in the belief of the people in Indonesia which usually symbolizes a spirit that has not yet calmed down due to an unfinished ritual process, is prostrating to a figure that can be interpreted as a form of act of respect or worship to the figure in the figure</p>
<p>Denotation</p> <p>A group of pocong depicted in the form of a creature with a shabby white cloth that wraps its entire body from head to foot with the body in a position with its head down touching the ground and is pointing to a certain object that is the focus of attention in the form of a figure depicting a woman.</p>	<p>Connotation</p> <p>A group of pocong figures who are prostrating to a figure can describe a practice of worshiping supernatural beings in the figure as a respected or worshipped figure which when associated with Indonesian culture is often referred to as a form of worship of the devil. When associated with social and religious aspects, this scene can be interpreted as a form of satire on certain practices such as idolatry or worship in the scope of society that are considered deviant.</p>
<p>Myth</p> <p>In Indonesian beliefs and folklore, the spirits of deceased people are not always free to go to the next realm, but can be used in terms of black magic or occult rituals, by going through this scene it can reinforce the myth that spirits can be controlled by certain forces. In addition, the Indonesian people also have a strong belief that the spirit of a person who remains in the world indicates that the spirit figure still has unfinished business, this scene can depict a spirit figure who cannot be separated from the realm of the human world due to being controlled by a supernatural force.</p>	

Table 2. Scene 2: Collection of Occult Symbols

Signifier	Signified
 	<p>In the shabby paper found by Budiman on his desk, a set of symbols such as the Ouroboros symbol has the meaning of the cycle of life, regeneration and immortality. The symbol of the Satanic Cross which depicts spiritual rebellion is mainly Christianity. A symbol of a seahorse that depicts a mysterious one that refers to its habitat on the seabed</p>
Denotation <p>In a tattered paper found by Budiman on his desk there was a set of symbols such as the symbol of Ouroboros shaped like a circular snake. Then there is the inverted cross symbol and the seahorse symbol that is behind the shabby paper which depicts the previous set of symbols.</p>	Connotation <p>The symbol of Ouroboros can be interpreted with the concept of the cycle of death and resurrection. In terms of the occult, the Ouroboros symbol can also show the relationship between the human world and the supernatural realm, and the Ouroboros symbol can also be a representation of sacrifices or rituals that must be repeated constantly. Then the symbol of the inverted cross or Satanic Cross can symbolize a symbol of defiance against a religion, especially Christianity such as Communion with occult things and abuse of religious teachings. Then the seahorse symbol which represents a mysterious meaning that refers to the habitat of seahorses on the seabed and seabed is the most mysterious place or location in the world, in harmony with the taboo, dark, and mysterious occult.</p>
Myth	

In various beliefs such as in the mythological concepts of Egypt and Greece which interpret the symbol of Ouroboros or the circular snake or the snake that bites its own tail is described as a symbol of endless cycles or in the sense of immortality. While in terms of the occult, the symbol of Ouroboros can be interpreted as a symbol of worship, sacrifice to supernatural entities and endless or endless rituals and nothing can stop it. In addition, there are several beliefs about the symbol of the inverted Cross, according to the story in the Catholic religion there is an apostle named Saint Peter who is the leader of the apostles and was the first pope. In short, Peter was put to death by crucifixion, but he insisted on being crucified upside down because he felt unworthy of being crucified like his god, Christ. Although in the Catholic tradition it has a positive meaning, many people associate this inverted cross symbol with Satanism. This is because certain groups opposed to Christianity use this symbol for the purpose of symbolizing loyalty to Satan and rejection of Christ. Then the seahorse symbol is believed by many occult traditions to be considered a symbol of magical and spiritual power. They often associate the ability of seahorses to explore the underwater world which is their habitat, which is considered to be a mysterious place and full of supernatural energy. Seahorses are also believed to carry a message from the supernatural world to the real world and are also believed to be helpful in magical practices.

Table 3. Scene 3: The symbol that Vishnu uses to communicate


Signifier	Signified
	The book that Rini is reading contains symbols that are symbols of the Talisman which in some conditions, the symbol of the Talisman can be a symbol of a secret group or sect that practices certain rituals.
	
Denotation Wisnu gave a book to Rini and Rini only saw the contents of the book containing a Talisman	Connotation The talisman symbol in the book can symbolize a symbol of protection from evil entities or supernatural forces. This

symbol without knowing its meaning and only knew the function of this book which according to Wisnu he used as a means of communication with his mother.	is strengthened by a conversation between Wisnu and Rini who said that the reason for using the Talisman as a communication medium was because he wanted the father figure of Wisnu's family who was considered evil by Wisnu and his mother could not know what they were talking about.
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Myth


Many cultures believe that the Talisman has supernatural powers that can protect its owner from the dangers of supernatural powers, including in Indonesian culture which is better known as the Talisman as a talisman. In addition to being believed to be able to protect from supernatural things, Talisman or amulets are also believed to bring good luck ranging from wealth, position, or in terms of romance for their owners and Talisman is also believed to be used as a medium of communication between the real world and the supernatural world.

Table 4. Scene 4: The ritual process is ongoing

Signifier	Signified
	A group of people wearing black robes and chanting incomprehensible prayers is a representation of the followers of a heretical sect who are performing occult rituals.
Denotation A group of people who are followers of the sect in black robes gather in an empty room, in front of which stands a small child who is the figure of Ian who is revealed to be a demon who controls the ritual, while behind Ian there are the characters of Mr. Suwono, Toni, and Bondi who are in a sitting position and behind them stand a pocong figure.	Connotation A group of people who wear black robes is a representation of followers of a cult or occult that originated in western occult culture, black robes are associated with the concept of evil and sin. The figure of Suwono, Toni, Bondi who is in a sitting position symbolizes resignation or in a weak position among a group of sect followers in the room, strengthened by the narrative in the scene where Suwono, Toni, and Bondi will be used as a tubal in the ritual process which will be presented to a

	demonic figure who becomes a figure worshipped by the followers of the occult sect.
Myth <p>Similarly in conventional beliefs, in terms of the occult, it is also believed to have its own rituals. Occult rituals are believed to always be associated with satanic worship. According to beliefs built from horror movies and conspiracy stories, often occult rituals involve human sacrifice rituals or commonly referred to as tumbal, in this case the figures of Suwono, Toni, and Bondi who are the sacrificial materials in occult rituals. The purpose of human sacrifice is not always the same goal, it depends on the context of the occult ritual being performed, but often this sacrifice occurs due to the occurrence of an agreement with a supernatural creature that asks for a certain amount of payment in the form of animal or human life. In addition, occult rituals are also believed to be carried out in places that are very hidden and not easily thought of by the minds of ordinary people because the occult is a taboo, dark and mysterious thing.</p>	

Table 5. Scene 5: The father figure undergoes the ritual execution process


Signifier	Signified
	<p>In this scene, it can be seen that the figure of Suwono's father is carrying out the execution of a sacrificial ritual that symbolizes death as a transition to another world or it can also be a condition for obtaining strength and sacrifice can also be a form of offering to supernatural forces.</p>
Denotation <p>The ritual process of sacrifice is ongoing with the involvement of Mr. Suwono as the object of the sacrifice by involving four horses as the instrument of execution and added to the followers of the sect in black robes who chant prayers that cannot be understood.</p>	Connotation <p>In traditional culture, sacrifice can be aimed at paying homage to gods or ancestral spirits, while in the occult, sacrifice can be interpreted as a way to gain power or as a form of ceremony in an occult practice, besides that the practice of sacrifice can also be a form of redemption of debts to supernatural beings after making a covenant or pesugihan, this is strengthened from the story in this film where the figure of Suwono's father It turns out that he</p>

	performs the pesugihan ritual to get offspring and of course in the agreement Mr. Suwono is required to give a tumbal, but it cannot be fulfilled until finally the figure of Mr. Suwono himself becomes the tumbal.
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Myth

According to many beliefs in society, sacrifices in occult matters often involve the sacrifice of humans, especially infants or virgin women, although in the modern era this belief has shifted slightly that it does not always involve humans but also involves animals, blood, or certain objects in place of the object being sacrificed. In addition, many people believe that sacrificial rituals are always closely related to the worship of demons or satanism with various purposes such as increasing supernatural powers, increasing wealth, improving offspring, and other things that should be obtained with effort, prayer and hard work but can be obtained instantly through occult rituals which usually lead to sacrificial rituals as redemption.

Table 6. Scene 6: The appearance of a demon who is deified

Signifier	Signified
	The figure of the devil named Raminom symbolizes a witch who represents organized evil through occult science, besides that the witch is also a symbol of control of the supernatural world and the real world through certain rituals and the witch is also always represented as an antagonist figure who creates fear in a film or folklore.
Denotation The demon figure named raminom is described as female wrapped in a white cloth that covers her entire body with a creepy facial stature. Physically resembling the figure of a kuntianak ghost.	Connotationi The figure of the demon Raminom which is the embodiment of a witch figure but physically resembles the figure of a kuntianak ghost can symbolize the merger of the two figures, namely a witch who is a witch doctor or a practitioner of black magic but becomes more terrible because the figure of kuntianak which is an entity or spirit of a gentayangan that is known to

	have a very long life, It can be concluded that Raminom is a magician who not only masters black magic, but also a spirit of the spirit. The figure of Raminom can also reinforce the narrative that the spirit and magic worlds can unite with each other and create more terrifying entity forms.
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Myth

Witches and kuntianak often reflect society's fear of uncontrollable supernatural forces and the potential for abuse. The figure of a witch who resembles a kuntianak in many stories describes the transformation or punishment meted out to someone who abuses their supernatural powers, or the consequences of the injustice experienced by a woman in the culture. This myth can be seen as a warning of the dire consequences of abuse of power and violations of natural or moral laws.

Discussion

The presence of symbols in a film work is not solely created to meet mere visual or aesthetic needs, but has a deep meaning content that wants to be conveyed to the audience. This is clearly seen in the film *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* which intensely displays symbols related to occult practices, both through the representation of images, properties, and characterization of figures. These symbols come in formulas that have been adapted to the larger theme of the story to provide an understanding of how occult practices work. Based on the search carried out, the symbols that appear are the result of acculturation or a combination of occult beliefs in Western culture with symbols of mystical beliefs of local culture (Kapcar, 2024) which create a rich and complex layer of meaning. In this context, the film "Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion" not only to provide entertainment, but also to invite the audience to reflect on the values and beliefs that exist in society.

One prominent form of symbolization is the use of *talismans* or amulets. *Talismans* are generally understood as lucky objects that are believed to have magical powers for protection or sellers, with forms that vary from diagrams to jewelry (Samsurizal & Sadi, 2025). However, in this film there is a shift in the function of *the talisman* that is quite unique. Through a scene where a character opens a book containing a collection of symbols, *the talisman* does not function as a means of protection from evil forces as is commonly believed, but is used as a medium of communication. The symbols in the book are translated into sign language that allows secret interactions between characters, showing that in this film universe, occult knowledge becomes a bridge of communication for its adherents (Kapcár, 2024).

In addition to *the talisman*, other symbolic representations were found on occult artifacts stored in a mysterious box. Inside is a paper with illustrations containing the symbols of the *Satanic Cross* and the Circular Serpent (*Ouroboros*). The existence of the Inverted Cross refers to LaVey's (1969) thought which interprets it as a representation of individualism, freedom of thought, and a provocative symbol to arouse criticism of conventional values, as well as being the antithesis of the symbol of the cross in Christian teachings (Holt, 2023). Alongside this symbol, there is *Ouroboros* which traditionally symbolizes the endless cycle of life, death, and renewal. Interestingly, the film modifies the visual of *Ouroboros* to resemble the number eight or *the infinity symbol*, which confirms the concept of infinity. Although it is described differently from traditional customs, the essence of its meaning is still in line with Campbell's (1988) view that death is not the end, but part of the transformation towards a new beginning (van der Sluijs & Peratt, 2009).

The manifestation of occult practices in this film is also brutally depicted through rituals of sacrificing lives. There is a scene of a terrible execution as a consequence of a supernatural or *pesugihan* agreement made by the character of the Father with a demonic entity named Raminom. Sacrifice is a collective ritual to bridge humans with supernatural powers. The execution method shown adopts the quartering technique using four horses pulling in opposite directions (Holoubek & Holoubek, 1995). This method was historically known in Western culture in the Middle Ages, but it also has historical traces in Indonesia during the VOC period in Batavia, precisely in the area now known as the Broken Skin Village (Jaśniewicz-Downes, 2024). This use of historical references reinforces the realistic horror feel while also showing how great a price must be paid in an alliance with the devil.

The representation of supernatural entities in this film is manifested through the figure of Raminom who is depicted as a woman wrapped in white cloth with a creepy face. This figure is a meeting point between the concept of witches in Western occultism and local ghosts. When viewed from a Western perspective, Raminom has magical attributes that have magical powers beyond formal religion (Sartini & Ahimsa-Putra, 2017). However, visually, this figure is very synonymous with Kuntilanak in the beliefs of the Indonesian people. Allerton (2002) interprets Kuntilanak as a manifestation of fear of unnatural death and a symbol of social injustice. The selection of visuals that resemble Kuntilanak is a cultural strategy so that the terror presented feels closer and relevant (*relatable*) to the collective fear of the local audience (Ng, 2025).

The acculturation of occult symbols is further emphasized through the depiction of the sect's followers. In the ritual process, this film displays a combination of contrasting but unified elements. On the one hand, there is a group of black-robed devotees who are a visual characteristic of cult followers in the Western occult tradition (Kapcár, 2024). On the other hand, the ritual also involves the figure of *pocong*, an iconic Indonesian ghost. *Pocong* as a symbol of imperfection of death rituals and unfulfilled spiritual obligations (Frolova, 2021). However, this film reconstructs this

meaning by placing pocong not just as a passive ghost, but as an active entity that also worships Raminom. The placement of pocong in line with the black-robed followers confirms the merging of the boundaries between global and local horror, creating a unique and gripping occult atmosphere (D. Prasetyo et al., 2025). This whole element shows how the film "Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion" manages to integrate occult symbolism with the local cultural context, creating an immersive and meaningful viewing experience.

Conclusion

This study concluded that the representation of occult symbols in films *Pengabdi Setan 2: Communion* is a manifestation of cultural acculturation that blends Western occult beliefs with local Indonesian mysticism, creating a new layer of meaning that goes beyond mere visual aesthetic functions. Through semiotic analysis, it was found that there were significant symbolic reconstructions, such as the shift of the function of the *talisman* into a medium of communication, the adaptation of the universal symbols of *Ouroboros* and the *Satanic Cross*, as well as the hybridization of supernatural entities in which the figures of Raminom and Pocong were placed in the ritual structure of the international sect. This phenomenon shows that the film manages to build a gripping and relevant horror atmosphere by blurring the boundaries between global terror and local fear, while at the same time confirming that the occult practice in cinema is portrayed as a bridge of cultural communication that binds its adherents in an endless cycle of sacrifice.

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The authors state that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest that can affect the objectivity, integrity, and interpretation of the results in this study.

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- Credit Author Statement

The author is fully responsible for all stages of this research, which include conceptualizing ideas, designing methodologies using Roland Barthes semiotics, collecting and curating film visual data, conducting formal analysis, and drafting, reviewing, and editing the final manuscript.

Declaration of AI Involvement

The author acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology as a tool in several stages of the preparation of this manuscript. ChatGPT and Gemini are used to help *brainstorm* ideas, paraphrase sentences to improve readability, and translate parts of the script into English. In addition, the authors specifically utilize the SciSpace and Scopus AI services to identify research *gaps* and search for relevant literature reference sources. The author verifies all outputs generated by these tools and is solely responsible for the accuracy and originality of the content in this paper.

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