

## FALSE HARMONY AND THE MORAL SEMIOTICS OF THE ZOMBIE IN THE INDONESIAN HORROR FILM *ABADI NAN JAYA* (2025)

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### Abstract

This paper examines the moral and cultural semiotics of zombie figures in the Indonesian horror film *Abadi Nan Jaya*. Utilizing qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in film and semiotics theories of culture Studies, the study deconstructs how visual form, color and narrative syntax shape signification of moral degeneracy and spiritual disquiet. The film flips universal stereotypes of the zombie from contagion, apocalypse and dehumanization to localized signs of karma, ecological upset and unsettled moral continuity. In the latter, a scene-based analysis shows mise-en-scène and color are crucial semiotic assets; green resurfaces prominently and now signifies harmony as such and becomes an idea of fertility which gets perverted by artificial light pollution and necrotic landscapes (portrayed here as for example the burned heath), visualizing that nature must still respond to the intoxication by human arrogance. Unlike western zombie stories that wrap up in apocalypse or repentance, *Abadi Nan Jaya* tells a morally uncertain tale of futility where an undercurrent of imbalance runs beneath the illusion of a finished circle. The undead corpse reflects ethical remnant, containing spiritual decay rather than residing in the material grotesque. These results suggest that Indonesian horror redefines global horror codes from within its own cosmological ethos, and that it could be described as a post-spiritual horror, a horror that turns fear into morality. The analysis furthers a more general dialogue on transnational genre adaptation, visual mythmaking, and shifting moral imagination in Southeast Asian cinema.

**Keywords:** *Indonesian horror cinema, zombie semiotics, moral decay, spiritual imbalance, cinematic ecology*

### INTRODUCTION

Back in the day Indonesian horror followed a familiar pattern: jump scares and cheap special effects. In the past, ruled by supernatural characters like ghosts, spirits and fabled beings, Korean horror has been increasingly reaching out to a wider choice of subgenres that could resonate better with viewers worldwide. From those, zombie genre which previously was alien and incompatible with Indonesia's habit, have been a phenomenon itself. This transition is not only one of aesthetic progression, but also suggestive of a cultural negotiation, a means to signal how global cinema languages can be re-formulated across regional visual and narrative idioms.

The phenomenon of the production and dissemination of Indonesian zombie films empirically demonstrates a particular point where globalization intersects localized culture. Previous films like *Kampung Zombie* (2015) also, *Reuni Z* (2018) brought the undead to our screen within lighthearted humorous and parodic tone indicating that the audience started developed interest into having fun with this genre. When the *Dead Awakens* (2019) and the

Netflix series *Red Zone* (2024) offered more serious renditions by introducing science fiction and social commentaries. Together, these films laid the foundation for a new visual and thematic vocabulary in Indonesian horror: a post-supernatural aesthetic that swaps ethereal mystique for corporeal infection, mutation and decay. Yet, along with the variety of works it produced, very few displayed an international appeal or aesthetic distinction beyond niche audiences.

This would all change with *Abadi Nan Jaya* (2025) better known as *The Elixir* internationally, the Kimo Stamboel directed film that is on Netflix as of October 2025. The movie was such a huge success for a locally made horror offering, becoming the number one film on Netflix's Global Top 10 for Non-English Films with over eleven million people viewing it globally in its first week (Chri, 2025). Unlike the *Zona Merah*, which was made as a series, *Abadi Nan Jaya* is a single feature that gave its creators an opportunity to play around with visual narrative in a concentrated and engaging way. The success of the film showed that even if it is based on Indonesian customs and folklore, an Indonesian story embedded with its cultural relevance can reach across borders through strong visual design and extensive digital promotion.

What sets *Abadi Nan Jaya* apart from other Indonesian zombie films is its formal and visual treatment of horror. The story centers on Sadimin, the owner of a declining herbal medicine (*jamu*) factory and his efforts to create an herbal remedy to revive his business, which turns him into the first zombie. The action takes place in the imaginary Javanese village of Wanirejo, against the backdrop of verdant landscapes that is a far cry from the post-apocalyptic surroundings that characterize most Western zombie movies. This framework disrupts the semiotic language of the non-living. Rather than embodying techno catastrophe or commercial decadence, the Indonesian zombie figures as a moral and spiritual status of human hubris and ecological degradation. The dominant mise-en-scène with its natural lighting, earthy coloration, lush natural green and traditional Javanese that makes up coordinates of a system of visual codes which position the narrative within local cosmological and ethical frameworks.

On film, *Abadi Nan Jaya* strikes an important midpoint between cultural integrity and genre novelty. Its zombie creature and presumably the herbal elixir is based on a *Nepenthes* or *kantong semar*, carnivorous plants found in Indonesia. This biological metaphor extends to the make-up and costume design, as well, with the zombies' porous skin textures indicating both organic rot and botanical mimesis. The framing and camera movement advertise the liquid bond between flesh and nature, enabling the film to develop a visual conversation between man, nature, and moral repercussion. In its visual and formal decisions, *Abadi Nan Jaya* creates a singular cinematic language about death, regeneration, and revenge.

However, despite its world-wide distribution, not much has been written in academic circles about *Abadi Nan Jaya* and especially about the visual structure of it. So much of the previous scholarship on Indonesian horror centers on socio cultural factors such as beliefs, gender, representations of class that leaving the cinema itself unexamined. This lack of formal, systematic studies feels like a blank spot in our understanding of how Indonesian filmmakers communicate philosophical and moral implications using visual design. Closing this space is crucial to understand the development of visual storytelling in Indonesian horror cinema, and not least in an era of global genre adaptation.

This article also considers *Abadi Nan Jaya* as a significant example through which to understand the mutation of signs in Indonesian films. Drawing on the theories of Roland Barthes and Christian Metz, the article examines how visual elements such as color dissonance, space composition, and camera points of view create a sign system that re-works the notion of “the zombie” in an Indonesian cultural context. The aim is to investigate what these signs mean, but also how they create new visual mythologies of fear and morality in the Indonesian aesthetic tradition.

The novelty of this research is to consider cinematic semiotics as a formal language rather than a sociological metaphor. Deconstructing *Abadi Nan Jaya* as one filmic text reveals how design plays a part in the localization of global genre. In theory, it adds to a discussion of film semiotics in Southeast Asian cinema and suggests how such regional filmmakers develop imported visual codes into meaningful expressions. In a practical sense, the article provides a structural method by which film scholars and producers might grasp how mise-en-scène and visual rhythm develop culture translation without collapsing local identity.

Finally, as with the other examples of new wave horror movies, *Abadi Nan Jaya* is a testament to an Indonesian cinema in which dominant international genre expectations are effectively mediated through visual translation. Its zombies weren’t the product of a scientific mishap but the expression of human struggle with nature. This article aims to illustrate how Indonesian horror ‘transcodes’ fear, death and redemption through the visual heritage that is uniquely and distinctively its own, based on cinematic semiotics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Horror films seem to be a rich source of understanding how fear works aesthetically and emotionally. The paradoxical pleasure of fear is something scholars have long been interested in, and it helps explain why the horror genre has demonstrated such cross-cultural staying power. Drawing on theoretical conceptions of horror, Indonesian cultural cosmology, qualitative film research and cinematic semiotics, this literature review maps the interstices in which zombie studies meet their match in the analysis of *Abadi Nan Jaya*. Each strand is considered not only as an origin of idea but as a possible tool for interpretation which helps in reading the visual and thematic shifts in the film.

This study is based on horror film theory which elucidates the way audiences can take pleasure in fear. This is called the aesthetic paradox by Julian Hanich, which fear stimulates a form of aesthetic enjoyment that intensifies viewers’ engagement with the film watching process (Hanich, 2011). This understanding is significant in the analysis of *Abadi Nan Jaya*, since terror does not always come from visual violence but also construction and pace. It provides the film with emotional power, making anxiety and empathy feel at once light and textured with spatial tension. Psychologically and biologically, horror is a safe place for humans to rehearse and work through potential threats and emotional distress in an imaginative way (Clasen, 2017). Within the context of Indonesian cinema, this system can explain why viewers embrace indigenous horror narratives catering both to supernatural fear and moral introspection. This crossing of horror with spirituality explained by a horror film, the viewer can in some sense see belief paradigms and questions concerning belief, sin and redemption made real (Grafius, 2022). This relationship between affect and ethics is particularly relevant

to *Abadi Nan Jaya* since it harnesses horror as a means of uncovering the moral implications of human hubris and ecological desecration.

So, to make sense of its narrative symbols, one must also go back to the cultural and mythological base that underpinned Indonesian culture. If we look from cultural tradition perspective, the syncretism in Javanese religion is comprised of animistic, Islamic, and Hindu–Buddhist elements with a moral logic that places emphasis on cosmic balance (Geertz, 1976). This critical lens allows us to read *Abadi Nan Jaya* as a parable of the tension and imbalance between human ambition and natural order. Indonesian cinema is a place of “cultural specificity within diversity,” a place where filmmakers re-code multinational genres with local visual and thematic variation (Hanan, 2017). *Abadi Nan Jaya* incorporates activities in village settings, herbal iconography and earthy colors to bring about this process of localization. Indonesian’s screen culture is a modern tradition whose global genres are re-read and appropriated through indigenous moral forms (Heryanto, 2015). This facet illuminates how *Abadi Nan Jaya* makes of the Western zombie a symbol for spiritual ramification. However, the Indonesian horror genre frequently renews its folklore tradition by recycling recurrent local myths into new narrative structures that encourage cultural introspection (Tiwahyupriadi & Ayuningtyas, 2020). This creative appropriation corresponds to that in folktales and legends collected by Adele de Leeuw and Alice Terada, which commonly depict nature as a moral agent that reestablishes equilibrium following human violation (De Leeuw, 1961; Terada, 1994). It serves as a backdrop and metaphor for the ethical complex ecology of the eyes in *Abadi Nan Jaya*’s moral landscape that is rendered through visual symbols.

The methodological approach to this study is based on qualitative and arts-based traditions which value interpretive depth and visual literacy. This is not simply practice based, in accordance with Miles et al: ‘analysis is a recursive sequence of condensing data, displaying data and drawing conclusions’ where interpretation should be systematically drawn from the empirical evidence (Miles et al., 2020). This model accommodates the scene-by-scene analysis used in this study, treating each frame of *Abadi Nan Jaya* as an individual unit of meaning to be iteratively analyzed and coded. The approach also uses an arts-informed method, which combines aesthetic knowledge with good research, while creative works are considered data and theory (Knowles, 2008). This view provides film the status of epistemic object that can be taken as a laboratory-test for culture in its form and style. On the next step, it is critical to form connections between artful observation, in such a way that film studies should combine creativity with just revealing of research (Ricciardelli et al., 2020). Another point is that any formal analysis should proceed from a closer look at the film’s material rather than using theory and its possibilities for analysis (Spadoni, 2014). In documenting the style and method of these performance systems, the method can be both analytically exact and aesthetic-sensitive in its semiotic reading of *Abadi Nan Jaya*.

The study of semiotic theory is used as the theoretical lens through which to read the film’s visual language. Roland Barthes defines meaning as a hierarchical process of signification that ranges from the primary signifier (denotation) through to the connotative level which includes myth (Barthes, 1967). This three-tier model demonstrates how film images work on a variety of different meaning and levels. In *Abadi Nan Jaya*, the body decays and works denotatively as a bodily transformation, connotatively as a moral decay and

mythically as an warning to not disturb nature's cycle. Barthes will later develop this notion with the "third meaning", still challenging to articulate in language but necessary for visual comprehension (Barthes, 1977). Christian Metz generalizes semiotics to the language of film and points out that through syntagmatic structure of shots, sequences meaning is created (Metz, 1974). His *grande syntagmatique* presents a model for thinking through how framing, editing, and spatial rhythm create narrative coherence. This fusion of Barthes and Metz enables this inquiry to bring together symbolic and formal dimensions of meaning, showing how *Abadi Nan Jaya* transcodes visual codes into the realm of ethical expression.

The history of Zombie as discourses has put *Abadi Nan Jaya* in a global history of genre and cultural cross-fertilization. The zombie's image has moved from its roots in Haitian mythology to a supple symbol of social and psychological malfunction. This transformation has been referred to as zombiism, an imaginary strategy used to critique environmental collapse, social inequality and posthuman identity (Hamilton & Heffernan, 2022). In today's zombie film reality, the monstrous transition has been reversed and rather than acting as another exterior to the metaphoric body of human society, zombies now resemble humanity in existential anxiety (Olney, 2017). Chera Kee also traces a movement of rehumanization that she argues characterizes some contemporary zombie tales which emphasize empathy and moral consciousness over nihilism and carnage (Kee, 2017). This change is visible in *Abadi Nan Jaya*, where the image of a zombie signifies guilt, regret and fear not chaos. The impact of transnational flows on contemporary zombie cinema, suggesting that regional film industries process global codes through national myths and lore (Ziegler, 2024). This argument also partly explains why *Abadi Nan Jaya* uses a worldwide horror reference to the gross-out genre to send an indigenous message about moral responsibility. The zombie discourse constantly mutates according to cultural fears and becomes a mirror of the anxiety of its times (Lanzendörfer, 2018). In the Indonesian case, this mutation transforms the zombie into a metonym for spiritual dis-harmony that expresses itself in both ecological guilt and the search for penance.

These theoretical perspectives collectively fill up a framework for the examination of *Abadi Nan Jaya*. Horror film theories that are used here explains (1) how fear is constructed as an aesthetic emotion, (2) cultural and mythological studies on the moral logic of Javanese spirituality, (3) qualitative research methods to safeguard analytical integrity vis-à-vis visual interpretation (cognition), (4) semiotics in order to decode filmic meaning with precision, and (5) zombie studies for understanding the films place within a global discourse of genre transformation. From this perspective, *Abadi Nan Jaya* is not just a localized horror film, but also a discourse in cinema which re-constructs the image of the undead. Its iconography makes global evocations of apocalypse legible in terms of an "Indonesian" metaphoric of balance, consequence and reconciliation, showing the ways in which regional aesthetics may participate with/transform global horror traditions.

Despite being grounded in semiotic theory, this article's aim is not to contribute to theoretical development. The semiotic model is used as an interpretive device and not a precise tool for measuring, thus allowing the analysis to highlight how visual signs of *Abadi Nan Jaya* convert Western horror formulae into culturally attentive Indonesian meanings. Ultimately, the

goal is to understand how symbols, myths and moralities are negotiated, not promote a theoretical line.

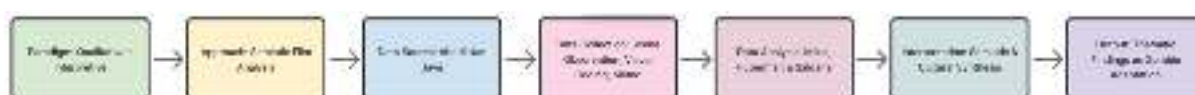
Figure 1. Horizontal overview of the theoretical integration in the literature review, showing sequential relationships among the five clusters of theory.



## RESEARCH METHOD

This study is not intended to test semiotic theory. Rather, it draws on semiotic theory as an analysis tool and seeks to consider how Indonesian culture visually/narratively reframes Western horror signs. Drawing on the theory outlined in the prior section, this study utilizes a qualitative interpretive design which focuses on generating meaning through visual and symbolic representation. The film *Abadi Nan Jaya* is analyzed as a cultural text that involves the encoding of moral, aesthetic and spiritual values into its cinematic form. The qualitative approach permits a sensitive engagement with the film's visual details, one recognizes that in cinema, meaning is not contained within any unit but resides rather between image production, story construction and interpretation.

Figure 2. Horizontal framework of the research design, depicting the qualitative interpretive flow from paradigm to analytical synthesis in the study of *Abadi Nan Jaya*.



With the help of a general methodological framework, cinematic semiotic analysis is genuinely adopted in this respect. The use of semiotics is validated by the aim of the investigation, which is to demonstrate how signs in the mise-en-scène, color and framing within the film work as meaningfully carrying objects. Roland Barthes' semiotic model of connotative signifying structures: denotatively, connotatively and mythologically (Barthes, 1967). Denotative level measures what is visible on screen such as objects, gestures, and color. Connotative analysis interprets the cultural and emotional significations carried by those visual features, whose mythic analysis reveals how these meanings function in articulating moral and ideological values among Indonesians. This is where the triple coding mechanism work, which structurally decodes the symbolic metamorphosis of the zombie figure in the film.

Christian Metz's theory of the syntactic system in cinema, look at film as being organized into a series of pre-formed visual units rather than discrete images (Metz, 1974), also complements Barthes' textual model. The grande syntagmatique structure is proposed to examine how different patterns of editing, movement and scene's change lead toward creating the narrative flow in a film. Taking from both the Barthes' theory and Metz's observation, the analysis can read *Abadi Nan Jaya* simultaneously in symbolic and formal level so that meaning and structure become inseparably intertwined.

This study's design adheres to qualitative methods which involve three concurrent steps: data reduction, data display, drawing conclusion verification (Miles et al., 2014). Data condensation, or filtering, is the process where we choose certain scenes and visual elements of the films for examination. This process involves transcribing shot descriptions, lighting, camera setup shots and color. Data display consists of arranging these field graphs in a matrix connecting visuals to their semantic readings, which makes visual patterns or thematic regularities visible. Verification of conclusions constantly tested for its interpretations according to what is seen, and theoretical coherence can help reduce the subjective bias. This circular method preserves analytical transparency and replicability in the qualitative paradigm.

The scene as a coherent segment of action that has narratorial and visual importance is the unit of analysis in this research. Every scene is deconstructed in terms of image layout, spatial design and the balance between human presence and environmental elements. For instance, the repeated representation of green fields and rotting corpses is scrutinized as not just an aesthetic decision but a cultural code designed to impart moral teachings about the need for balance in ecology. In that sense, the re-appropriation of common village space and natural light is read as a formal statement on the simultaneous prospects of harmony and turmoil, in tune with the movie's ethical underpinning.

An arts-informed orientation informs this research, which recognizes film as an artistic creation on the one side and epistemic object on the other. Knowles (2008) elucidate that arts-informed inquiry reconsolidates the creative and analytical, affording researchers opportunities to interpret artistic works as cultural texts. This paves the way for an examination of *Abadi Nan Jaya* not just as narrative material, but as formal innovation, aesthetic strategy and cultural heritage. Forms of various film elements such as camera, color, sound and editing help understand how meaning is visually made and emotionally communicated (Ryan & Lenos, 2020). Their approach is applied here to determine how cinematic devices in *Abadi Nan Jaya* function as semiotic systems that inform audience interpretation.

The implementation of this analysis is based on an analytical matrix linking visual modalities to semantic/syntactic levels. Each shot is analyzed in terms of its (1) visual component (mise-en-scène, color, framing and movement; and denotative meaning), (2) connotative meanings, (3) mythic or moral significance, and (4) structure within the film sequence. This manner of organization facilitates comparisons across the film's visual figures and owes consistency to its interpretation. The method is based on the concept of theoretical abstraction and follows close attention to formal details to retain analytic focus (Spadoni, 2014).

Validity in the research is accomplished through the process of repeated viewing and triangulation among theoretical viewpoints. To maintain a reliable approach to recognizing visual motifs and their meanings, several viewings of *Abadi Nan Jaya* are undertaken. Interpretations are challenged against existing theoretical paradigms by Barthes, Metz and the cultural-horror literature to secure conceptual consistency. Analytical reflections and memo writing are recorded during the process as an audit trail of how interpretations develop from observations to theoretical constructions. This approach is consistent with Saldaña (2016) focus on transparency and reflexivity in qualitative analysis.

The research approach, in short, blends qualitative rigor with aesthetic sensitivity. The film is treated as an elaborate textual construction in which all styles of visualization contribute to cultural meaning. Using a combination of cinematic semiotics, qualitative interpretation and arts-informed inquiry the objective is to explore how *Abadi Nan Jaya* refigures global zombie iconography as an Indonesia moral and visual grammar. This methodological framework has the advantage of conceptual depth and analytic focus, which permits such research to combine cinematic form with cultural meaning in a comprehensive and interpretive way.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The semiotic analysis of *Abadi Nan Jaya* reveals a complex progression of visual signs from representations of social harmony and ordered religious life to portrayals of moral atrophy and unassimilated spiritual disorder. It recasts international zombie conventions not as tales of apocalypse but as hymns to karma and ecological corruption. And with its mise-en-scène, color dynamics and narrative syntax; *Abadi Nan Jaya* fashions a very Indonesian moral cosmology within the global horror continuum.

Figure 3. *The natural green palette in the opening ritual scene signifies harmony and moral purity within Javanese cosmology.* Screenshot from *Abadi Nan Jaya* [Film], directed by K. Stamboel, 2025, Netflix. Copyright 2025 by Netflix, Inc. Reproduced under fair use for educational purposes.



The shot in the opening sequence showing traditional herbal medicine making sets the tone for the key imagery of balance. The tempo is slow and the tone serenity, both supported by natural light and greenery. The scene sanctifies manual labor, blending economic production with ritualized reverence for the earth. This accord mirrors the Javanese notion of *rukun*: a harmony between human will and nature (Geertz, 1976). In a semiotic system à la Barthes, these images are first-order signs of daily life: yet they produce second-order meanings; myths of moral purity and ecological innocence (Barthes, 1967).



The following village ritual further underlines this link between ritual and cosmic order. Through its rhythmic connections in editing and communal framing, the film conveys the idea of cyclical preservation of life and tradition. Sound is considered further, notably the sounds of suburban nature and children's laughter in their affective warmth, such that they provide a supplementary sensation of unity of culture. But this fleeting equilibrium is the delicate foundation upon which a moral disarray will be erected. The movie makes its moral stakes clear from the start: peace is valuable since it doesn't last forever.

The first break in the narrative is in the scene with dangerous driving; this is where modern foolishness enters into a religious territory. The cameras get jerky in place of static compositions, hand-held in place of locked down and the lighting is sharp and metallic. As it is felt as a "shift" between the images. This sudden visual interruption demonstrates a syntagmatic breach; a passage from the orderly to the disorderly, from narrative cause and effect to the visual form of causality (Metz, 1974). The car wreck is not just a physical accident but a moral failing: humanity's failure to accept limitation. In this sense, the scene carries forth the Western zombie myth of scientific arrogance but reposition it in a Javanese system of morality where imbalance invites vengeance instead of an apocalypse (Clasen, 2017).

Figure 4. *The harsh lighting and rapid camera motion visualize moral disruption caused by human arrogance toward natural order.* Screenshot from *Abadi Nan Jaya* [Film], directed by K. Stamboel, 2025, Netflix. Copyright 2025 by Netflix, Inc. Reproduced under fair use for educational purposes.



This theme is only heightened by the flashback to the laboratory. Its close-ups of test tubes and chemical mixtures echo an earlier series of shots using herbs and natural remedies, now illuminated by artificial light. Both poetic and literal, the inverting of natural green into artificial luminescence causes wild wisdom to give way to modern exuberance (Barthes, 1977). In the film's visual language, color is moral index. The laboratory's antiseptic precision, set up symmetrically, disguises moral corruption as scientific advancement.

The zombie in a way embodies this moral perversion. The reanimated corpse, though disgusting, does not affect the lighting and atmosphere, which remain the same (natural and soothing), triggering fear and panic that something bad comes from something reassuring. Unlike the infection-driven Western zombie, or even those made zombies through consumption, this Indonesian zombie exists primarily as a residue of morality, a human who cannot achieve spiritual equilibrium lead to the body being consumed by excess karma. As bodily decay is tightly framed, the closer one looks to decaying flesh, the more emotive the reaction of not disgust but empathy, it provokes in audiences and aligns with Kee's understanding of the "rehumanized undead" as horror for ethical contemplation (Kee, 2017). The enemy is no longer the undead, it's the human being reflected in all its excess.

Figure 5. *Synthetic yellowish green hue in the eyes, marking the transformation of vitality into moral corruption.* Screenshot from *Abadi Nan Jaya* [Film], directed by K. Stamboel, 2025, Netflix. Copyright 2025 by Netflix, Inc. Reproduced under fair use for educational purposes.



As the narrative unfolds, the pace of the editing shifts between natural dynamics and dissonance. This pendulum sets out a moral pattern that is similar to the Javanese cosmological concept of *keselarasan* (balance) and *ketidakseimbangan* (disorder). Every transgression encourages a visual counter, like the film is itself acting out some ritual of moral backlash. But rather than ending in destruction or redemption, as does the Western horror story, *Abadi Nan Jaya* offer closing with open questions. This contagion is spreading silently, as if it were incapable of being eliminated; only absorbed into the fabric of everyday life.

In visual terms the application of color and landscape is an important semiotic device in disclosing this moral continuum. The repeated use of the green theme, first symbolic of fertility and peace, becomes soiled with the introduction of fire and smoke in its last appearance hovering over the rural horizon. The thing which was a manifestation of life becomes the illusion of beauty, hiding death. As Barthes said, the meaning of any color (or sign) is determined by its cultural context and its use within a specific "mythology" or second-order

semiological system (Barthes, 1967). The green hue in this film becomes into a mystical iconography, a normalized symbol that conceals ideological conflict. And the landscape becomes calm and spoiled simultaneously, expresses the illusion of healing as it allows for a sense of permanence to disruption. The movie is content to paint the world in wide, splashy strokes, even though it is morally sick.

Structurally, *Abadi Nan Jaya* creates something like a grammar of spiritual decadence. Its cyclical editing: ritual, disruption and aftermath, indicates repetition more than closure. The film's closing montage of rural landscapes and distant burning collapses from visual metaphors into uncanny reality: the image of the zombie as a curse visited upon individuals becoming an incarnate collective destiny. The infection is no longer a part of the story; it is now a state of being. This resonates with the concept of the contemporary zombie as a transnational figure that feeds on anxiety across moral ecologies (Hamilton & Heffernan, 2022). Here the ecology is Javanese, and the anxiety is spiritual exhaustion.

The final image, the little village drenched in afternoon light with thin ribbons of smoke billowing up from among green fields, epitomizes what the film is about. The image is misled by its serenity, at the same time indicating that contamination is there forever. The moral order has not been reset; it has become corrupt. Nature's still breathing, but with compromised air. This visual contradiction establishes the film in a burgeoning subgenre of post-spiritual horror, in which distinctions between sacred and profane images share space within the frame and resolution is replaced by moral fuzziness.

In the end, *Abadi Nan Jaya* turns this zombie myth from an apocalypse symbol to a meditation on continuance, a grim revealing of how human mistakes and ecological trespass are visited on us spiritually time after time. Its semiotic system links global horror aesthetics with local cosmological ethics to produce a kind of horror that is not about the end of the world so much as the perpetuation of imbalance within it. The film thus repositions Indonesian horror as a language of reflection, not redemption; the mirror reflects viewer not with terror of death, but with disturbing observation that beauty itself maybe mask decay.

Figure 6. *The tranquil green fields veiled in distant smoke visualize deceptive harmony, symbolizing an ongoing cycle of moral decay.* Screenshot from *Abadi Nan Jaya* [Film],

directed by K. Stamboel, 2025, Netflix. Copyright 2025 by Netflix, Inc. Reproduced under fair use for educational purposes.



## CONCLUSION

The basic semiotic reading of *Abadi Nan Jaya* is a product of that complicated negotiation between global horror-sign systems and Indonesian moral cosmology. Not an epiphany, but a disturbing vision of (dis)continuity that nature is calm, even though the visible marks of destruction have remained. Its vague ending of course turns the ethical dream into an unresolvable nightmare, with salvation seeming impossible in a world already marred by human arrogance.

In the imagery, the grammar progresses from natural accord to environmental desecration. The lush green that once represented fertility and harmony is infused with the remnants of fire and smoke during the film's closing shot. This chromatic shift reflects a moral one: nature's beauty remains, but its purity has been tainted. The calm surface of the land is a caution that we are never redeemed, only absolved; human actions just start a process of decay that even nature can't fully fix.

If they managed to survive longer through day-to-day struggle, on fortunes wheel they inevitably see no gain just loss. The wheel is one of the clear motifs and in this case, it operates as a riff on animism. By replacing Western survival narrative with an ethical point of view, *Abadi Nan Jaya* constructs zombie myth into an allegory about spiritual dread. The undead are no longer just the apocalyptic metaphors; they're literalized karmic symptoms, moral infection festering subtly under moral beauty. This relates to Barthes' definition of myth as the cultural deflection, where banal signs (green field, natural light) hide ideological conflict (Barthes, 1967). The fact of infection that lingers in the natural world brings home the point that imbalance (once forged) has a way of multiplying itself exponentially.

Closing shot of the burning yet green village typifies a paradox within Indonesia's recent horror aesthetics: peace is destroyed before our eyes. This ambivalence redefines the nature of horror in Southeast Asian spirituality that is not the end of the world, but endless human error. The film, therefore, involves what Kee terms the "rehumanized undead," that horror is a place for ethical recognition, but the recognition of itself comes too late to restore equilibrium (Kee, 2017).

In a much larger context, *Abadi Nan Jaya* adds to the transnational horror conversation by illustrating that adapting is not copying (translation) so much as altering (transformation). It takes up Western horror tropes of arrogance scientific inquiry, contagion, and apocalypse but rearticulates them on a Javanese cosmological axis as visual parables of moral fatigue (Hamilton & Heffernan, 2022; Ziegler, 2024). But its conclusion refuses any kind of closure, suggesting that the line between nature and corruption, life and death has been irreparably blurred.

In the end, *Abadi Nan Jaya* leaves viewers in a state of reflective disquiet. The vision of peacefulness belies undying moral corruption; in the Indonesian panorama, horror is not a means to escape death so much as an alternative way of living in the shadow of your own transgressions. And the film doesn't end in restoration but acknowledgment that messing with the order of life as we have, we've also messed up the language used to make meaning, beauty and balance out of it.

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