
REPRESENTATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE CHARACTERS IN INDONESIAN HORROR NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the representation of violence against female characters in Indonesian horror novels, examining how these portrayals reflect societal views on gender and power. By analyzing three popular novels, the research focuses on types of violence—physical, psychological, and symbolic—that female characters experience, aiming to uncover how these depictions critique patriarchal norms. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study uses textual analysis alongside a feminist narrative framework to interpret recurring themes and patterns within these narratives. Findings reveal that, while female characters are often portrayed as victims, they also demonstrate moments of resistance and agency, challenging traditional roles and societal expectations. This ambivalent portrayal highlights both the vulnerability and resilience of women, offering insights into the complex dynamics of gender in Indonesian culture. The study concludes that Indonesian horror novels serve as a powerful medium for social critique, using horror to comment on issues of gender-based violence and the potential for women to disrupt oppressive structures. This research emphasizes the role of literature in reflecting and challenging societal norms, particularly regarding the representation of women.

Keywords: feminism, horror, Indonesian novels, patriarchy, representation, violence, women

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women has become one of the social issues that continue to be discussed in various fields, including in literary studies (Paradkar et al., 2024). In the context of horror literature, women are often vulnerable to various forms of violence, both physical, psychological, and symbolic. The concept of the representation of violence in horror literature includes the depiction of female characters as victims who experience extraordinary suffering, both as a result of human actions and supernatural entities. This violence often creates dramatic effects or reinforces story themes (Owens, 2020).

Violence against women in literary works, especially in the horror genre, is often one of the decisive elements in building the tension and atmosphere of a story (Çelebi et al., 2024; Shahriar & Alam, 2024). However, it is essential to question how this violence is positioned in narratives, especially in Indonesian horror novels. Are female characters only seen as victims, or do they have an agency to fight and survive? This article aims to analyze the forms of violence experienced by female characters in several contemporary Indonesian horror novels and look at these representations in the context of Indonesian socio-culture.

Horror is one of the most prolific genres in Indonesian literature, and horror novels often depict physical and psychological violence directed at women (Kristeva, 2024; Stopenski, 2022). In the context of Indonesian society, which is still dominated by a patriarchal culture, an analysis of

how women are represented in horror works can provide insight into social perspectives on gender-based violence.

The problem that arises from this representation is how women are stereotyped as weak victims of violence or, in some cases, as figures who transform into evil entities after the violence they experience. Many Indonesian horror novels use female characters as the center of horror narratives but without paying attention to deeper gender critiques of what violence means in social and cultural contexts. For example, in popular horror novels, female characters who experience tragic deaths or sexual violence are often presented as "eternal victims" who are unable to escape the cycle of violence (Dewi, 2017; Handayani, 2020; Yulianti, 2022).

Horror is one of the most prolific genres in Indonesian literature, and horror novels often depict physical and psychological violence directed at women. In the context of Indonesian society, which is still dominated by a patriarchal culture, an analysis of how women are represented in horror works can provide insight into social perspectives on gender-based violence.

Similar research that discusses violence against women in Indonesian horror novels has also been conducted before. The research discusses the role of gender in the novel *Cantik itu Luka* by Eka Kurniawan, influenced by the dominance of one gender, which leads to problems such as gender inequality, marginalization, stereotypes, subordination, and job dissatisfaction (N.L.A. Febrianti et al., 2023). Another research discusses women's sexuality as monstrous so that it is represented as a snake in the narrative of the novel (Mayasari-Hoffert, 2020a). Monstrosity is also constructed by two mother figures who refuse to live within the confines of patriarchal ideology by choosing to be widowed.

The discussed space in Abdullah Harahap's works is unique because he not only serves as a builder of a tense atmosphere but also because it is where the relationship between horror and social situations comes into play (Jaber, 2021). The city has become a marker of the relationship between moral degradation and capital accumulation through various unnatural professions. The village then became a place that was threatened not only by modernity but also by feudalism and colonialism. Furthermore, violence in the anthology of short stories of the *Setan Slave Group* is divided into three based on its form, namely verbal violence, physical violence, and psychological violence. Two factors cause the emergence of violence in the anthology of short stories of *Kumpulan Slave Satan*, namely patriarchal social structure and *heteronormativity* regression (Dewi Mayasari, 2021; Fitria Sis Nariswari, 2017; Suhendi et al., 2017). It discusses the paradox of constructing femininity by Intan Paramaditha. In an effort to construct femininity, female ghosts are presented as legends in the midst of patriarchal cultural power. The presence of female ghosts explores the body and psychology of female ghosts (Mawaidi Mawaidi, 2020).

Additional studies further explore how horror literature and film engage with femininity, monstrosity, and power. For example, Intan Paramaditha's works present female ghosts as symbols of femininity within patriarchal contexts. At the same time, other research on horror films analyzes the archetype of "The Last Girl" as a figure of resilience. Internationally, studies on horror films and novels, such as Stephen King's *Carrie* and *Misery*, examine female characters who are both victims and agents of horror, challenging traditional portrayals of women as passive figures. These analyses emphasize the need for a critical approach to horror narratives, ensuring that portrayals of female suffering do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes but instead offer insights into gender and power.

The formulation of the problem and the purpose of this research are to explore how violence against female characters is represented in Indonesian horror novels and reflect social views on

women in society. In addition, this study also aims to identify patterns of repetitive violence and how women are portrayed as victims or subjects in the narrative. As such, this research is expected to contribute to a broader discussion of gender-based violence in horror literature, as well as offer new insights into understanding the role of women in this genre.

The novelty of this study lies in its critical approach to Indonesian horror novels, especially those published after 2010, which shows the increasing popularity of this genre in contemporary literature. Different from previous studies that tend to focus on plot analysis and horror elements, this study emphasizes the importance of looking at the representation of violence against women in the context of Indonesian gender, society, and culture. This analysis offers a new perspective on how horror novels can reflect social tensions related to gender and power in patriarchal societies (Puspitasari et al., 2023).

The urgency of this study is very important considering the increasing popularity of horror novels in Indonesia, especially among young readers. As part of popular culture, these novels serve as entertainment and a medium that can influence people's perspectives on social issues, including violence against women. Therefore, a critical analysis of the representation of women in horror novels is important to ensure that these works do not reinforce harmful gender stereotypes but can instead be a means to promote a more inclusive and progressive understanding of the role of women in society (Cakradiningrat et al., 2023). This research is relevant because, globally, horror works are often considered a tool to express social fears and anxieties about women's empowerment. In the Indonesian context, horror novels are also often influenced by mystical traditions and folklore that often treat women as subjects of suffering or magical powers. Therefore, exploring how these novels represent the relationship between violence and women is important.

While this study primarily relies on Western feminist theories to analyze the representation of violence against women in Indonesian horror novels, it acknowledges the limitations that may arise from applying these frameworks across distinct cultural contexts. Western feminist theories often reflect experiences and perspectives shaped by different social and historical backgrounds, which may not fully align with Indonesian cultural norms and values. However, these theories remain relevant and applicable in this analysis, as they provide foundational tools for examining gender-based power dynamics and the portrayal of women as victims or agents within narratives. By using these frameworks thoughtfully, this study aims to bridge cultural differences, highlighting universal themes of gender, agency, and resistance while respecting the unique socio-cultural elements of Indonesian horror literature. This approach allows for a nuanced interpretation that acknowledges both global and local perspectives on gender in horror narratives.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the representation of violence against female characters in Indonesian horror novels. This approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of the meanings embedded in violent narratives and how these narratives reflect the social and cultural context of Indonesia. By focusing on a qualitative analysis of narrative texts, the study aims to uncover the ways in which female characters experience and respond to various forms of violence.

The data collection process involved selecting three novels—*Mystery of the Salt Statue* by Ruwi Meita (2015), *Asih* by Risa Saraswati (2017), and *Wingit* by Sara Wijayanto (2020)—based on their relevance to the topic and their explicit depictions of violence against women. These novels

were chosen because they showcase diverse forms of violence experienced by female characters, including physical, psychological, and symbolic violence, which are significant for understanding gender dynamics within Indonesian horror literature. Data were collected through detailed textual analysis, where the researcher carefully read each novel, marking and recording passages that related to the representation of violence and the socio-cultural implications of these portrayals. Additionally, secondary data from relevant literature, journals, and articles were gathered to enrich the analysis and provide context for the primary texts.

For data analysis, a content analysis technique was applied, guided by feminist and narrative approaches, to examine the recurring themes and patterns in the depiction of violence. The analysis process included several key steps to ensure a systematic approach. First, data reduction was conducted, where relevant data were selected and organized from the novel texts, focusing on passages that highlighted different forms of violence. Next, categorization was used to group the data according to the types of violence depicted (physical, psychological, and symbolic) and the roles of female characters within these narratives. This was followed by an interpretation phase, where the researcher analyzed the meanings of these violent representations in the context of Indonesian socio-cultural norms and feminist theory. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the findings, aiming to capture the broader implications of the representation of violence in shaping societal perceptions of women and gender-based violence.

Through this detailed approach, the study seeks to provide a transparent and credible analysis of how violence against women is portrayed in Indonesian horror novels, highlighting the socio-cultural and gender-related messages conveyed through these narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Violence Against Female Characters in Indonesian Horror Novels

Physical Violence

Physical violence can be defined as an act that causes fear, loss of confidence, loss of ability to act, feelings of helplessness, and severe psychological suffering in a person (Fadlurrahman, 2014). Physical violence is a deliberate, aggressive behavior by a person toward another person that results in physical injury, most often occurring in trust relationships, causing feeling helpless and isolated and prone to the development of various pathological conditions (Caponnetto et al., 2024). In the novel *The Mystery of the Salt Statue* by Ruwi Meita, a female character gets physical violence by being killed. A female figure who works as a pianist and painter was found dead with missing organs and bald hair. These two female victims are victims of a psychopath who has trauma from her past with her family.

The physical violence depicted in Indonesian horror novels, experienced by all female characters, is in the novel. For example, the character Asih in the novel *Asih* by Risa Saraswati experienced physical violence in the form of death because she felt ashamed of her pregnancy. Asih's character experienced physical violence in the form of suicide because the man who impregnated her did not want to take responsibility.

Physical violence is also experienced by the female characters in the novel *Wingit* by Sara Wijayanto. Almost all women in this novel are depicted as having received acts of physical violence. One of them is the character of Siti, who experiences physical violence in the form of rape and murder. Siti was raped by the centeng who guarded her because she did not accept that Siti left the

prostitution environment to become an independent and independent woman. Centeng felt that Siti betrayed him by blindly raping and killing Siti by inserting a piece of wood into her genitals.

Female characters are often portrayed as victims of murder, mutilation, or sadistic torture. These scenes of physical violence are usually exploited to create tension and horror sensations. An example that often appears in Indonesian horror novels is the depiction of female characters whose antagonists, both humans and supernatural entities, brutally murder. This violence reaffirms the stereotype of women as helpless victims and becomes the object of extreme suffering. The representation of women as ghosts or monsters of roles and behaviors states that if women do not apply as roles and behaviors are assigned to them (Azizah, 2022a, 2022b; Larasati & Adiprasetyo, 2022; Puspitasari et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2023).

Psychological Violence

In addition to physical violence, psychological violence is also an essential element in the representation of women in horror novels. Female characters often experience mental trauma, threats, and psychological distress that affect their psychological condition. Persistent fear, mental manipulation, and verbal abuse are often used as a way to isolate women from their reality and expose their helplessness in the face of uncontrollable forces.

Psychological violence is experienced by the character Asih in the novel *Asih* by Risa Saraswati. Asih's character experiences psychological pressure because she does not get protection from her parents and environment. Asih experienced psychological pressure from her parents because she had to be a perfect child and be an example for her younger siblings, so when she got pregnant outside of marriage, Asih's parents could not accept her situation. In addition to not getting support from her parents, Asih's character does not get support from the environment. The community considers what Asih experienced to be a disgrace. The pressure from the community made Asih's character desperate and unable to think clearly. The character Asih ended his life so he would no longer feel pressure.

Psychological violence is a form of violence that causes stress, inhibits self-perception, and causes emotional distress, often leading to anxiety, unhappiness, and poor psychological care, affecting overall well-being. Psychological impacts vary among different subgroups due to their unique characteristics, problem-solving abilities, cognitive abilities, and social environment. However, research shows the presence of trauma in sexual violence, known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which includes severe self-reflection, mood swings, and recurrent thoughts and feelings (Alhakim, 2021; Anindya et al., 2020; Sesca, 2018).

Symbolic Violence

Indonesian horror novels also often rely on symbolic violence in the representation of women. This symbolic violence appears in the form of the depiction of women as incomplete creatures, both as victims and evil supernatural entities. For example, female characters killed unnaturally often return as vengeful ghosts, such as the figure of *kuntilanak* or *sundel bolong*. This symbolic violence not only reinforces the stereotype of women as victims but also places them as a symbol of fear and horror that transcends the boundaries of humanity (Flynn et al., 2018).

Women's helplessness causes the symbolic violence experienced by female characters in horror novels. Women's helplessness is caused by patriarchal dominance. Women are not allowed to fight back and express their opinions. Women are silenced by their preconceptions and

limitations. Additionally, various histories of these famous ghosts are linked to each other, such as the fact that women are more vulnerable to sexual violence and that they have limited access to justice and health services.

Violence that occurs subtly and unconsciously by the dominant party is called symbolic violence. When a predominantly person uses symbols (concepts, ideas, ideas, beliefs, and principles) in a distortively accepted form and applies dominant class judgment standards to judge themselves and their lives, this is called symbolic violence. Although very subtle symbolic coercion occurred during the process of domination, the dominated was unaware that he was being coerced. It is called common sense. Looking like a form of cooperation, symbolic violence benefits the dominating and the dominating (Sugiarti, 2021; Wahyuni et al., 2019).

Reflection on Social Views on Women in Society

Violence against women in Indonesian horror novels cannot be separated from the social and cultural context that influences the formation of narratives. This representation of violence reflects the social view of women in patriarchal societies, where women are often positioned as weak and easily exploited.

In this study, the reflection of social views on women in society shows that violence against women in horror novels often reflects the patriarchal view of society. Women are also depicted as evil supernatural beings such as kuntilanak or sundel bolong, which adds an element of symbolic violence and places women as a symbol of fear and horror.

It is referred to as contemplation of phenomena. It presents life in literary works and triggers problems that often arise in Indonesian literary works, especially novels that feature the figure of women on the problem of violence experienced by women. Literary works often display the existence of women and the problems that color women's life journeys (Rangkuti, 2022).

Women as Victims of Patriarchal Violence

The violence experienced by female characters in Indonesian horror novels often reflects the position of women in a patriarchal society. They are portrayed as helpless victims of violence, often attacked by greater forces, be it male figures or supernatural forces. This reflects a power structure that places women as objects of suffering who have no control over their fate. This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes about women being weak and in need of protection (Marcus, 2020).

Women are often portrayed as victims of physical, psychological, and symbolic violence in patriarchal societies. Horror narratives often point to violence experienced by women in patriarchal societies, which often support power and domination. Women are also depicted as evil supernatural beings such as kuntilanak or sundel bolong, which adds an element of symbolic violence and places women as a symbol of fear and horror.

Fear of Women's Power

Women are often portrayed as victims of physical, psychological, and symbolic violence in patriarchal societies. Horror narratives often point to violence experienced by women in patriarchal societies, which often support power and domination. Women are also depicted as evil supernatural beings such as kuntilanak or sundel bolong, which adds an element of symbolic violence and places women as a symbol of fear and horror.

On the other hand, some horror novels portray women as influential figures, especially when they have crossed the boundaries of humanity and become terrifying supernatural entities. The portrayal of women as vengeful ghosts or evil creatures shows social fear of the potential for unbridled female power. The women in these stories often use their power to take revenge for the violence they experience, which suggests that even though they are placed as victims, they also have the potential to resist and disrupt the existing social order (Creed, 2022).

Recurring Patterns of Violence

Women as 'Eternal Victims'

In many horror novels, women are portrayed as victims of violence who are never truly free from their suffering. The violence experienced by female characters is often shown as ongoing suffering, either in the form of repeated physical violence or deep psychological trauma. This pattern confirms the idea that women in Indonesian horror novels are faced with inevitable violence and have no way out.

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Horror narratives that portray women as victims and as supernatural beings reinforce and reflect the existing patriarchal structure. It is essential to understand this representation in order for us to understand better the symbolic and cultural forces that shape our view of gender and drive change in the way we see and treat women in society (Creed, 2015).

Women as Ambivalent Figures

Women in horror novels are often portrayed with duality as weak victims as well as terrifying supernatural creatures. This reflects a patriarchal view that limits women to narrow roles. The representation of violence in horror narratives can be seen as a reflection of the reality experienced by women in society, where they often experience physical, psychological, and symbolic violence. Horror novels not only function as entertainment but can also be a means to criticize people's views on women. Through the analysis of characters and narratives, we can understand how gender stereotypes are reinforced or challenged.

Horror novels show women as ambivalent characters, namely as victims as well as perpetrators of violence. Women who were initially victims of physical or psychological violence often transformed into terrifying and influential supernatural figures. This transformation shows that women have the potential to transcend their victim role and become terrifying figures to the society that has hurt them (Yadav et al., 2021).

Violence as Revenge

Another pattern often found is the violence experienced by female characters as the starting point of their revenge. In some novels, the violence experienced by female characters, such as murder or sexual harassment, triggers them to rise as supernatural entities that haunt and attack the perpetrators of violence. This shows that although women are positioned as victims, they also

have the power to demand justice through the violence they commit as a form of revenge (Puspitasari et al., 2023).

In horror novels, female characters who were initially victims often turn into supernatural beings for revenge. This shows that female characters experiencing violence can make their identity change. Female characters transform them from victims to fearsome and empowered people. Violence is often used as a tool to enforce dominance in patriarchal societies.

However, the character of women who take over power as supernatural entities can be considered a form of resistance to the patriarchal structure. In addition, this representation shows society's reaction to women who dare to oppose injustice. The revenge carried out by female characters can be considered a warning of the consequences of the violence they experienced.

Women as Victims and Subjects in Narrative

Although women are often portrayed as victims of violence in Indonesian horror novels, they do not always lose agency entirely. In some novels, female characters have a dual role, namely as victims as well as subjects who have an agency to fight the violence they experience. This is seen in the portrayal of women as supernatural entities that have the power to take revenge or, in some cases, as women who are able to fight human antagonists with physical strength or ingenuity.

Women in Indonesian horror novels, although often the object of violence, also have the potential to challenge their traditional role as victims. They are not just waiting to be saved but often seek to overcome the violence they experience and reclaim control over their bodies and identities (Mayasari-Hoffert, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study found that violence against female characters in Indonesian horror novels is represented through various forms of physical, psychological, and symbolic violence. This violence is not only used to reinforce the horror elements in the story but also reflects the social view of women in a patriarchal society, where women are often positioned as victims. However, the women in this narrative also have the potential to resist, especially when they transform into supernatural figures full of power. Indonesian horror novels thus offer an ambivalent portrayal of women, both as victims and as subjects who have the power to challenge the social norms that limit them.

Violence against female characters in Indonesian horror novels is a complex narrative element, where women are often placed in the position of victims but often have the potential to resist or respond to the violence they experience. This horror novel can be understood as a reflection of the social tensions that exist in Indonesian society, where women are faced with systemic violence but at the same time have the opportunity to challenge patriarchal norms through resistance, both physical and supernatural.

This representation of violence, while often brutal, also reveals the dynamics of power that continue to evolve in women's narratives in Indonesia, both in terms of their weaknesses and their strengths. Horror novels can thus be seen as a reflection of social fear of shifting women's power in society, as well as an arena where gender violence is questioned and confronted.

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