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Greed, Family, and the Supernatural: A Study of Di Ambang Kematian (2023)

Ageng Suci Saumi,¹ Alysia Luthfi Nurjanah,² Desih, Mely Putri Susanti,³ Rahmalia Citra Sahaya⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty of Letters, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

³Email: reygading1@gmail.com

Abstract

*This study explores the complex relationship between family dynamics, supernatural beliefs, and the consequences of greed as depicted in the Indonesian horror film *Di Ambang Kematian* (2023). The film, directed by Azhar Koino Lubis, tells the tragic story of Nadia, who falls victim to her father's ritual search for wealth and reveals a moral stupidity driven by greed. The study investigated how a character's emotional response to loss and greed develops throughout the story using qualitative analysis and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' five-stage grief theory. These results suggest that supernatural elements serve as metaphors for internal conflicts, illustrating the negative effects of materialism on family relationships. This study places *Di Ambang Kematian* as an important object about the dark aspects of human nature and cultural attitudes towards greed and helps to understand modern Indonesian horror cinema as a representation of fear and moral dilemma.*

Keywords: Greed, supernatural beliefs, regret, qualitative.

INTRODUCTION

The horror film genre has long served as a lens through which societal fears, anxieties, and moral dilemmas are examined. A compelling recent addition to this genre is *Di Ambang Kematian* (2023), a film that has captivated audiences since its release on September 28, 2023, drawing 3.3 million viewers within its first month of screening (Liputan6.com, 2023). Produced by MVP Pictures and directed by Azhar Koini Lubis, the film stars Taskya Namya, Wafda Saifan, and Teuku Rifnu Wikana (Kompas). Adapted from a viral 2022 Twitter thread by @jeropoint, the story weaves a chilling narrative of greed, supernatural revenge, and familial tragedy.

The plot follows Nadia (Taskya Namya), whose life is upended by her father's decision to engage in a *pesugihan*—a wealth-seeking ritual. The ritual claims the lives of Nadia's mother and brother, Yoga, leaving her tormented by grief and pursued by a horrifying entity: a human-like figure with a goat's head. As her own life becomes endangered, Nadia embarks on a quest to uncover the truth behind her family's tragic fate and the ritual that unleashed their suffering (Blibli Friends, 2023).

Di Ambang Kematian explores the devastating consequences of greed, intertwining themes of supernatural beliefs with the psychological and moral breakdown of familial relationships. Greed emerges as a powerful motivator that drives characters to morally questionable actions, often with catastrophic outcomes. As Kasser (2013) notes, "Materialism and greed can damage personal well-being and interpersonal relationships" (p. 56). In the film, the relentless pursuit of wealth triggers supernatural events, exposing the characters' fears, vulnerabilities, and moral failings.

The narrative employs classic horror tropes to highlight how avarice fractures family bonds, using supernatural elements as metaphors for internal struggles. Cherry (2009) describes horror's purpose as to "scare, shock, revolt, or otherwise horrify the viewer" (p. 14), which is evident in the film's depiction of supernatural vengeance and familial betrayal. These elements, rooted in Indonesian cultural attitudes towards morality, underscore the societal impact of greed while delivering an intense cinematic experience.

This research delves into the complex interplay between family dynamics, supernatural beliefs, and greed in *Di Ambang Kematian*, analyzing how these themes reflect societal fears and moral dilemmas. The study applies narrative analysis alongside Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—to examine the psychological evolution of the characters. By dissecting the film's thematic and psychological layers, this research contributes to the broader discourse on Indonesian horror cinema and its cultural significance.

Indonesian horror films have a storied history, blending folklore, societal anxieties, and supernatural elements to address complex themes like family conflict and moral decay (Heryanto, 2014). The genre has evolved to incorporate contemporary issues, such as materialism and social expectations, while maintaining its cultural roots. Recent successes like *Pengabdian Setan* (2017) and *Di Ambang Kematian* (2023) illustrate how modern techniques can complement traditional narratives, broadening their appeal both locally and internationally.

Horror cinema, as Barker (2018) posits, transcends mere entertainment, offering profound commentary on the intersections of individual, familial, and societal dynamics. By examining *Di Ambang Kematian*, this study aims to enhance our understanding of how horror films function as both cultural artifacts and vehicles for exploring psychological fears and societal critiques.

METHODS

This research used qualitative method. Bodgan & Taylor (as cited in Panambunan et al., 2022) explain qualitative methodology as a procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from the objects observed. Basically, the nature of qualitative research is descriptive and the form of data is a description of the research object. The data source is the film by Azhar Kanoi Lubis entitled *Diambang Kematian* which was released in 2023. Other references were also obtained through literature studies and using theories from Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five-stage theory of grief (1969) regret, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, it examines how the characters' emotional responses to loss, greed, and the supernatural develop to support and develop this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The protagonist of the film is Nadia Maharani Putri, played by Taskya Namya. She is a young woman who becomes the sole survivor after her family members fall victim to her father's pesugihan rituals every 10 years. The primary antagonist is Pak Suyatmo, played by Teuku Rifnu Wikana. He is Nadia's father who performs pesugihan rituals that result in his family members' deaths every decade to advance his business interests. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) said regret, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, it examines how the characters' emotional responses to loss.



Picture 1; regret

Throughout the film, Suyatmo's father shows deep regret, especially after realizing that his pact with supernatural beings to gain wealth has led to the death of his wife and children. The scene where Suyatmo considers his decision and its impact on his family shows his regret.



Picture 2; anger

Nadia's older brother Yoga becomes furious after their mother tragically dies, partly due to a cursed family enchantment. He assaults their father, blaming him for the string of deaths, and displays enormous anger as he tries to grapple with the loss of their mother.



Picture 3; bargaining

This is depicted in the scene where Nadia and her dead father are trying to find ways to undo the effects of enchantment. Some of the methods they try including performing rituals and talking to spiritual figures. This shows their attempts to confer with fate so that they do not suffer further losses.



Picture 4; depression

Nadia is overwhelmed by the deaths happening around her and the knowledge that she may be the next victim. As she contemplates the inevitability of the curse, she falls into a deep sense of despair and sadness, which mirrors her grief.



Picture 5; acceptance

Towards the end of the movie, Nadia acknowledges her family's curse and suffering. A powerful emotional turning point in the story occurs when she goes from trying to prevent the inevitable to accepting her destiny.

The characterization in the film reflects the central theme of greed and its destructive effects. Nadia is a strong and independent woman who carries the emotional weight of her family's troubles. She is pragmatic, skeptical of traditional supernatural beliefs, and represents the rational side of the story. Nadia is driven by her need to uncover the truth about

her family's dark past and to protect her brother from their father's legacy. Her strength and resolve often clash with the older generation's acceptance of fate and supernatural influence. In contrast to her father, Suyatmo is now bedridden and consumed by guilt for the choices he made in pursuit of wealth. His silence speaks volumes, and his character represents the destructive consequences of unchecked greed.

Yoga, Nadia's old brother, is more sensitive and emotionally connected to their family's heritage. While he initially shares some of Nadia's skepticism, his experiences in the family home slowly pull him into the world of Javanese mysticism. Yoga's internal conflict lies in his struggle between modernity and tradition, as well as his loyalty to his family versus his desire to escape their curse. He becomes increasingly open to the idea that the supernatural forces at play may be real.

Bastala is the supernatural entity tied to the family's curse. He is an unseen but ever-present force, representing the embodiment of the family's greed and moral corruption. Bastala serves as a symbol of the consequences of Suyatmo's deal with the supernatural, and his influence grows stronger as the family's internal conflicts escalate. Though he is a spirit, Bastala's presence drives the plot forward, manipulating events from behind the scenes and deepening the family's fear and paranoia.

And ibu is a deeply spiritual and traditional woman who is caught between her love for her family and her belief in the old ways. She represents the generational divide between traditional beliefs and the modern world, constantly performing rituals and prayers in an attempt to protect her family from the curse. Her character is one of quiet resilience, though her efforts often feel futile in the face of the overwhelming supernatural forces. Ibu's relationship with Nadia is strained, as Nadia rejects the spiritualism that Ibu clings to.

The film's setting plays a crucial role in creating an atmosphere of dread and isolation. Much of the story takes place in a remote, rural village, with dark and desolate surroundings. The story begins in the early 2000s, takes place in East Java. This film involves several locations such as houses, forests, cemeteries and schools. The time period in which this film takes place revolves around day and night, especially New Year's Eve. The events of the story take place over a few days, beginning in the morning on the first day and culminating at midnight on the final day. The transition from daylight to darkness symbolizes the shift from normalcy to chaos, as supernatural forces grow stronger with the coming of night. The final day coincides with a significant family anniversary, a date tied to the mysterious death of the patriarch, further entangling the family's fate with the supernatural.

The film can be classified under supernatural horror rather than slasher genre. It involves elements of local mythology related to pesugihan rituals that summon supernatural entities. There isn't an explicit character who defeats the bad guys through supernatural means like shamanism or religious rituals. Instead, the narrative focuses on how Nadia's family members fall victim to these supernatural forces without any direct confrontation leading to their defeat. Nadia does not possess any specific supernatural abilities such as seeing spirits or having other paranormal abilities. However, she does experience various terrifying events that make her life

precarious. The film *Di Ambang Kematian* is deeply rooted in local Indonesian mythology related to pesugihan rituals. These rituals involve making deals with evil spirits at a cost, often resulting in human sacrifices. This theme reflects social concerns about greed and its consequences within families and communities. The story highlights how such practices can lead to devastating outcomes, emphasizing themes of guilt, responsibility, and survival against all odds.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Di Ambang Kematian* (2023) highlights the destructive consequences of greed through the lens of family dynamics and supernatural beliefs. By integrating these elements, the film shows how the relentless pursuit of material wealth can cause moral corruption and lead to the breakdown of family bonds. Through the story of Nadia and her family, viewers see how greed can bring immense suffering, loss, and chaos. The film highlights that greed is not only about wanting more wealth but also about how the desire for material gain can destroy relationships and cause long-lasting emotional damage.

By applying Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief regret, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The film provides a deeper look into the emotional journey of its characters. The stages reflect their personal battles with grief, guilt, and the consequences of their actions. Suyatmo, the father, shows regret after realizing the cost of his greed, while other family members express anger and despair as they struggle with the tragic outcomes of his choices. Nadia's acceptance at the end of the film marks the emotional and psychological conclusion of the story, as she comes to terms with the family's curse and the inevitability of their fate. This emotional depth makes the film more than just a horror movie, as it presents a complex, emotional exploration of human nature and greed.

This analysis not only enriches our understanding of *Di Ambang Kematian* but also contributes to the study of modern Indonesian horror cinema. The film uses horror not just for entertainment but as a tool to explore bigger societal issues, like materialism and family conflict. The combination of traditional horror elements, such as supernatural curses, with the cultural realities of Indonesian society, makes the film a strong commentary on how personal greed can lead to widespread suffering. Ultimately, *Di Ambang Kematian* offers an important lesson about the dangers of prioritizing wealth over relationships, emphasizing the severe consequences that can arise from such choices.

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