

Haunting as Revenge: Female Rage in Kimo Stamboel's *Ivanna* (2022)

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Abstract

Indonesia's rich cultural heritage and folklore are deeply intertwined with ghost stories, which have significantly influenced the country's horror film genre. Ivanna (2022), directed by Kimo Stamboel, explores the vengeance of a Dutch colonial woman's ghost, reflecting themes of betrayal and historical injustice. This study examines how Ivanna represents the "monstrous-feminine," drawing on Barbara Creed's theory to analyze the depiction of female rage and societal taboos. Through qualitative analysis of the film's narrative elements, this research highlights how Indonesian horror films often portray female ghosts as symbols of resistance against patriarchal injustices. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of gender representation and cultural narratives in Indonesian horror cinema.

Keywords: *betrayal, folklore, horror, monstrous-feminine, revenge.*

A. Introduction

Ghosts, or the spirits of the departed, remain scientifically unproven phenomena. However, they hold significant cultural and emotional resonance worldwide. According to Sthulman (2008), every culture has developed unique beliefs and practices surrounding the existence of such entities. In Indonesia, a nation renowned for its diverse cultures and traditions, the idea of ghosts or spirits is deeply intertwined with folklore and legends. These stories, passed down through generations, have solidified the cultural familiarity and acceptance of these supernatural elements. Growing up surrounded by ghost stories and urban legends, Indonesians have cultivated a unique affinity for the horror genre, which serves as both entertainment and a reflection of cultural beliefs.

Horror is one of Indonesia's most popular film genres, deeply rooted in the nation's storytelling traditions. From the classic *Sundel Bolong* (1981) to the recent release of *Ivanna* (2022), the genre has evolved significantly, capturing the imagination of Indonesian audiences. This evolution has transformed horror into a dominant force in the local film industry. The *Economist* (2024) reports that the production of Indonesian horror films surged from fewer than five in the 1990s to over 40 by 2018. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the resurgence continued, with 50 horror films released in 2023, including *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022), directed by Joko Anwar, which became the highest-grossing film in Indonesian cinema.

The *Danur* series, created by Risa Saraswati, marked a pivotal moment in modern Indonesian horror. Debuting with *Danur* (2017) and followed by *Danur 2: Maddah* (2018), the series captured public attention, paving the way for *Ivanna* (2022). Based on Saraswati's novel *Ivanna Van Dijk* (2018), *Ivanna* explores the haunting tale of a vengeful ghost and achieved remarkable success, amassing 2,793,775 viewers by August 30, 2022. This film represents a convergence of historical, cultural, and gendered narratives, making it an ideal case study for this research.

This study focuses on *Ivanna* as a lens to examine the themes of vengeance and female rage in Indonesian horror cinema. Female ghosts dominate the genre, with iconic figures such as *Kuntilanak*, *Sundel Bolong*, and *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol*. These spectral characters often share similar backstories, marked by betrayal, sexual violence, or unjust treatment during their lifetimes. Their posthumous vengeance challenges societal norms and patriarchal structures, embodying what Barbara Creed defines as the "monstrous-feminine." Research by Larasati and Adiprasetyo (2022) found that between 1970 and 2019, 60.47% of Indonesian horror films featured female ghosts as central figures, compared to 24.15% featuring male ghosts, and 15.38% including both genders. These female ghosts symbolically resist the oppression they endured in life, turning their rage into a source of power in death (Kustina, 2010, as cited in Larasati and Adiprasetyo, 2022).

This study employs a qualitative approach, using Barbara Creed's theory of the "monstrous-feminine" to analyze *Ivanna*. By focusing on the film's depiction of a vengeful female ghost, this research explores how Indonesian horror reflects societal and cultural anxieties, particularly those concerning gender and historical injustice. This analysis not only contributes to the growing body of literature on Indonesian horror but also provides insights into the cultural and emotional significance of female ghosts as symbolic figures of resistance and empowerment.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, grounded in Barbara Creed's theory of the "monstrous-feminine," to analyze the film *Ivanna* (2022) directed by Kimo Stamboel. The data is derived from repeated viewings of the film, with each viewing focusing on specific narrative and visual elements, including character development, thematic symbolism, and cinematographic techniques. During each viewing, detailed notes were taken to document key scenes, dialogues, and character interactions. Thematic coding was used to identify recurring motifs of vengeance and rage, particularly as they relate to Creed's conceptualization of the "monstrous-feminine." The analysis also incorporates contextual factors, such as Indonesia's colonial history and gender norms, to situate the film within its broader cultural and societal framework. By combining theoretical analysis with a close reading of the film's elements, this study aims to uncover how *Ivanna* represents unresolved historical injustices and female rage. This method allows for a nuanced exploration of the intersection between folklore, gender, and horror in Indonesian cinema, while acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of qualitative analysis. Steps were taken to ensure rigor, such as cross-referencing observations with secondary sources and peer consultation to validate interpretations.

C. Findings and Discussion

Narrative Elements and Themes

The film *Ivanna* (2022) encapsulates themes of vengeance, betrayal, and unresolved emotional trauma, using a supernatural narrative rooted in Indonesia's historical and cultural context. Through repeated viewings and thematic coding, the analysis identified that the film intertwines historical injustices with the supernatural portrayal of female rage.

1. Plot Analysis

The narrative unfolds across two timelines: the colonial era (1943) and the post-colonial period (1993). Ivanna Van Dijk, the antagonist, symbolizes betrayal and systemic injustices faced by her family, who were supportive of the indigenous people but ultimately betrayed and murdered during the Bersiap period. Her transformation into a vengeful ghost aligns with Barbara Creed's notion of the "monstrous-feminine," wherein female monstrosity emerges as a response to systemic violence and betrayal.

o Key Scene Analysis

A pivotal moment occurs when Ivanna, moments before her decapitation, vows, "Every drop of my blood will make you restless" (01:12:59). This declaration, coupled with her haunting rage, underscores how her anger stems from both personal and collective betrayals, resonating deeply with the historical trauma of colonialism.

2. **Characterization**

- **Ivanna Van Dijk:** The embodiment of the “monstrous-feminine,” Ivanna represents female rage against injustice. Her initial benevolence toward the indigenous people starkly contrasts with her vengeful ghostly presence, reflecting a transformation driven by betrayal and violence.
- **Ambar:** As the protagonist, Ambar’s ability to perceive spirits positions her as a counterbalance to Ivanna. Her role emphasizes the importance of understanding and confronting historical trauma to achieve resolution.
- **Supporting Characters:** Each character, from the orphanage residents to the antagonistic figures, contributes to the overarching narrative of fear, betrayal, and eventual redemption.

Cinematic Techniques and Supernatural Elements

1. **Visual and Symbolic Representation**

The cinematography employs contrasting lighting and settings to depict the stark dichotomy between the living and the spectral. Ivanna’s decapitated head, a recurring visual motif, symbolizes the brutality of her death and her disjointed existence between worlds.

2. **Supernatural Tropes and Folklore**

The film incorporates elements from Indonesian folklore, such as the headless ghost and Noni Belanda archetype, contextualizing Ivanna within a broader cultural narrative. These tropes resonate with local audiences, reinforcing the film’s authenticity and appeal.

3. **Temporal and Spatial Settings**

- **1943:** The colonial backdrop highlights the systemic exploitation and subsequent violence during the Bersiap period.

- **1993:** The modern timeline juxtaposes historical trauma with contemporary struggles, demonstrating how unresolved past events continue to haunt present generations.

Discussion

The findings reveal that *Ivanna* effectively leverages the "monstrous-feminine" to critique historical and societal norms. Ivanna's ghostly vengeance is not merely an act of personal rage but a broader commentary on betrayal and gendered violence. The use of horror as a medium allows the film to explore taboo subjects, such as the exploitation of women and the lingering effects of colonialism, in a manner that is accessible yet thought-provoking.

1. Cultural and Historical Context

By situating the narrative during the Bersiap period, the film draws parallels between personal and collective suffering. Ivanna's transformation into a vengeful spirit symbolizes the repressed anger of those silenced by history.

2. The "Monstrous-Feminine" in Action

Creed's theory underscores how female monstrosity, as depicted in *Ivanna*, challenges patriarchal norms. Ivanna's haunting serves as both retribution and a reclamation of agency denied to her in life.

3. Contemporary Relevance

The film's exploration of betrayal, colonial violence, and gender dynamics resonates with modern audiences, reflecting ongoing societal struggles. The juxtaposition of folklore with cinematic storytelling bridges historical context with contemporary cultural identity.

The qualitative analysis of *Ivanna* highlights how the film uses the horror genre to delve into profound themes of vengeance, betrayal, and the enduring impact of historical trauma. Through its compelling narrative, richly developed characters, and adherence to folklore, the film serves as a poignant critique of societal and historical injustices, making it a significant contribution to Indonesian cinema.

D. Conclusion

Kimo Stamboel's *Ivanna* (2022) demonstrates how supernatural horror, grounded in Indonesian culture and history, serves as a powerful medium for exploring themes of betrayal, revenge, and unresolved trauma. Using Barbara Creed's concept of the "monstrous-feminine," the film portrays Ivanna, a vengeful Dutch ghost, as a symbol of

the psychological and emotional scars left by Indonesia's colonial past. Ivanna's fury, directed at the indigenous people who betrayed her, critiques historical injustices while addressing societal conventions that suppress women's voices.

The film intertwines horror with cultural and historical references, incorporating elements of folklore and colonial history to deepen its narrative resonance. Through its two central characters—Ivanna, who represents unresolved pain and fury, and Ambar, who symbolizes the living's attempt to protect and heal—Ivanna explores the tension between the past and present, the human and the supernatural.

Moreover, the movie contributes to the horror genre by offering a nuanced perspective on gender dynamics. It highlights how female ghosts in Indonesian horror cinema symbolize resistance against patriarchal oppression, using supernatural power to reclaim agency in death. In this way, *Ivanna* not only enriches the horror genre but also provides a poignant commentary on justice, cultural identity, and the lasting impact of historical trauma.

E. References

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