

THE FILM BALAMPAH AS A CULTURAL TEXT: A JOHN FISKE SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. The film *Balampah* (2023, directed by Aditya Nugraha) presents a narrative rooted in Banjar culture, especially the oral traditions, ritual imagination, moral norms, and mystical beliefs that circulate in South Kalimantan. This article examines *Balampah* as a cultural text by using John Fiske's semiotic framework, which reads media texts through three levels of coding: reality, representation, and ideology. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method supported by observation of film scenes, documentation, and interviews with members of the production team. The analysis shows that the film encodes cultural signs through Qur'anic recitation, musala imagery, gamelan sound, dance-house space, mantra, susuk emas, amulets, pusaka, and the narrative of marwah. At the level of reality, these signs build the social world of a Banjar community caught between piety, entertainment, and magical desire. At the level of representation, camera movement, lighting, mise-en-scene, dialogue, horror conventions, and melodramatic characterization intensify the opposition between sacred order and worldly excess. At the level of ideology, the film articulates several cultural myths: moral binary opposition between religion and worldliness, occult consequence or tumbal, ancestral protection, spiritual redemption, female sanctity, and the ever-present evil. *Balampah* therefore functions not merely as local horror entertainment, but as a cultural discourse that reproduces collective anxieties, moral warnings, and negotiations of identity in contemporary Indonesian society.

Keywords: *Balampah*, film, cultural text, John Fiske, semiotics, Banjar culture

I. INTRODUCTION

Film is one of the most powerful forms of mass communication because it combines narrative, image, sound, performance, and editing in a single audio-visual text. It does not only provide entertainment; it also distributes ideas, normalizes values, and represents the social imagination of a community. In cultural studies, film is therefore read as a text, namely a structured field of signs through which social meanings are produced and negotiated. The signs contained in a film may appear ordinary, such as clothing, body movement, speech style, location, music, religious symbols, and ritual objects, but those ordinary details become meaningful when they are placed inside a narrative structure and a cultural horizon.

Balampah, a 2023 local film directed by Aditya Nugraha, is important to be discussed because it presents a story that is strongly attached to South Kalimantan and Banjar cultural memory. The title itself points to a journey, both physical and spiritual, and to a passage through a cultural world in which religion, local belief, social morality, and supernatural imagination meet. The film follows the life of Gendis, a young woman who must face the inheritance of her mother's ritual debt and the consequences of mystical practices connected to attraction, desire, and danger.

Through this narrative, the film transforms oral tradition, mantra, local myth, and horror conventions into an

audio-visual cultural text. The story begins from a disturbed village space in which the calm of religious life is interrupted by the presence of a dance-house and by forms of entertainment that are coded as excessive. The conflict expands into a supernatural conflict that crosses time, body, and generation. In this way, the film links personal fate to a larger cultural order.

The background of *Balampah* also shows the role of local cultural archives. The thesis source explains that the film was inspired by interest in oral literature, particularly mantra, and by the desire to combine this oral heritage with a local genius associated with mystical tradition in Kalimantan Selatan. One important cultural element is the mantra *Pupur Pakasih* or *Pur Sinupur*, which is associated with attraction, affection, and being loved. When such a cultural element enters a film, it is not only repeated as folklore; it is re-coded through actors, images, sound, camera, editing, and dramatic conflict.

The study of *Balampah* is relevant because Indonesian local horror often becomes a site where culture and ideology are articulated. Similar films, such as *Saranjana: Kota Ghaib* and *Racun Sangga: Santet Pemisah Rumah Tangga*, demonstrate that stories about local myth, spirits, santet, and occult knowledge attract audiences and create a public conversation about regional identity. Such films are not neutral. They frame which practices are considered safe or

dangerous, which bodies are associated with temptation, which spaces are coded as sacred or profane, and which moral order is imagined as legitimate.

John Fiske's semiotic model is useful for analyzing this case because it organizes film signs into three levels. The level of reality concerns signs that appear to belong to everyday life, including environment, appearance, behavior, gesture, speech, and social interaction. The level of representation concerns technical codes, such as camera, lighting, sound, editing, narrative structure, and genre convention. The level of ideology concerns the deeper social values carried by the first two levels. Through these levels, *Balampah* can be read as a complex text that simultaneously depicts local culture and produces ideological meanings about morality, gender, spirituality, and social order.

Based on this background, the article addresses three questions: how cultural signs are represented in *Balampah*; how the structure of signs in the film can be analyzed through John Fiske's three semiotic levels; and what cultural meanings can be revealed from *Balampah* as a cultural text. The objective is not to judge the film only from aesthetic quality, but to understand how local signs become cultural arguments within a popular film form.

Semiotics studies the production of meaning through signs. A sign does not stand alone; it becomes meaningful through relation with other signs, through convention, and through the cultural knowledge of the interpreter. In the context of film, signs are produced by image, dialogue, costume, sound, editing, actor performance, setting, and narrative sequence. A film text is therefore a layered text because the audience receives visual, verbal, and auditory signs at the same time.

John Fiske emphasizes that television and popular media produce meanings through codes. Although Fiske's model is often introduced in television studies, it is highly relevant for film because film also organizes reality into representation and ideology. The level of reality includes socially recognizable codes such as appearance, dress, environment, behavior, gesture, expression, and speech. These codes make the world of the text believable because they resemble everyday life.

The level of representation includes the technical organization of those reality codes. Camera distance may make a character appear intimate or distant; lighting may produce safety or danger; music may create calm or threat; and editing may construct continuity, shock, or suspense. In a horror film, representation codes are especially decisive because fear is created not only by what is shown, but also by how, when, and with what sound the object appears.

The level of ideology refers to the social values and myths that become naturalized through the text. Ideology is not always stated directly. It can appear through patterns of opposition: sacred versus profane, village versus city, male versus female, pure versus polluted, human versus spirit, and tradition versus modernity. When these oppositions are repeated and resolved in a certain way, the film teaches the audience which side is desirable and which side is dangerous.

Film as a cultural text also means that film is part of a larger cultural circuit. It draws from collective memory, social

norms, religious vocabulary, local history, and popular genre expectation. *Balampah* draws from Banjar and South Kalimantan cultural resources, but it also participates in the broader Indonesian horror tradition. Therefore, its meanings emerge from the meeting between local cultural codes and the conventions of national popular horror.

In this article, the term cultural sign refers to visual, verbal, auditory, or narrative elements that point to a recognizable cultural system. Examples include the *musala*, Qur'anic recitation, gamelan sound, dance-house, mantra, *pusaka*, *susuk emas*, family debt, and *marwah*. These signs are not interpreted separately; they are analyzed according to their position within the film's structure and according to their ideological function.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a semiotic approach. Qualitative research is appropriate because the object of analysis is not numerical data but signs, meanings, scenes, utterances, and cultural codes. The data are taken from the film *Balampah*, field notes made during observation of scenes, documentation related to the film, and interview information from the production team.

The thesis source identifies three main informants involved in the production process: Aditya Nugraha as producer, Saris Diding Pamungki as assistant director and script editor, and Oyonk Mahyudin as art director. Their position is important because they are directly involved in the selection of story material, visual style, and cultural elements. Their statements help clarify why certain local idioms, oral traditions, and symbolic objects were chosen in the film.

The analysis is carried out in three stages. First, the researcher identifies cultural signs in the film, such as the use of Qur'anic recitation, *musala* space, gamelan sound, dance-house setting, mantra, *susuk emas*, amulet, *pusaka*, and the concept of *marwah*. Second, those signs are classified according to Fiske's three levels: reality, representation, and ideology. Third, the researcher interprets the cultural myths produced by the arrangement of those signs.

Triangulation is used by comparing scene observation, interview statements, and theoretical interpretation so that the analysis does not depend on a single impression. The unit of analysis consists of scenes and narrative sequences that explicitly show cultural conflict or symbolic concentration. Particular attention is given to the opening conflict between religious soundscape and dance-house atmosphere, the emergence of the mantra and magical objects, the role of Gendis as a figure of inherited trauma, and the resolution through sacrifice and moral restoration.

The limitation of this study is that it focuses on textual and production-based interpretation. Audience interpretation is not examined directly. Therefore, the findings should be understood as a reading of the film text and its cultural codes, not as a final claim about how all audiences interpret the film. Future studies may add reception analysis to compare dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings.

Table 1. Informants involved in the production of Balampah

Name	Age	Position
Aditya Nugraha	45	Producer
Saris Diding Pamungki	45	Assistant director and script editor
Oyonk Mahyudin	42	Art director

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Main cultural signs and their semiotic functions

Cultural sign	Reality code	Dominant meaning
Qur'anic recitation and musala	Religious sound and sacred communal space	Order, piety, protection
Gamelan and dance-house	Entertainment, sound, bodily performance	Worldliness, temptation, disturbance
Pupur Pakasih mantra	Oral tradition and spoken formula	Magical desire and inherited memory
Susuk emas and ritual objects	Material object attached to body and power	Attraction, manipulation, occult debt
Necklace and pusaka	Heritage object and protective weapon	Ancestral protection and destiny
Marwah	Moral honor and social judgment	Redemption, female sanctity, restored order

The first finding concerns the representation of cultural signs at the level of reality. Balampah places the audience in a social world where sacred and profane signs appear in direct opposition. Qur'anic recitation, musala imagery, and communal religious calm are represented as signs of order, purity, and spiritual protection. In contrast, gamelan, the dance-house, alcohol, seduction, and night entertainment are represented as signs of worldly desire and moral disturbance. This opposition is not simply decorative; it becomes the first mechanism through which the film frames the conflict.

The village is not merely a location, but a moral space in which each sound and object is loaded with value. The sound of religious recitation indicates a communal order that should be protected. The sound of gamelan and the laughter from the dance-house break this order. The audience is therefore not only asked to see a physical contrast, but to hear a moral contrast. Sound becomes a sign of social disturbance.

The mantra is another important sign. The thesis source records that the filmmaker intentionally used oral literature as cultural inspiration. The opening mantra Pupur Pakasih functions as a cultural bridge between Banjar oral tradition and cinematic horror. As a spoken formula, the mantra carries

memory, authority, and secrecy. In the film, however, the mantra is not presented as an innocent heritage; it is attached to desire and to the pursuit of affection through supernatural means.

This transformation shows how oral tradition becomes a dramatic code when inserted into the filmic text. A mantra that may be known as part of local oral culture is recontextualized within a plot of seduction, debt, and supernatural consequence. The sign therefore moves from cultural archive to narrative engine. It gives the film local identity while also providing horror motivation.

Magical objects such as susuk emas, amulet, necklace, and pusaka operate as concrete signs. They are visible, touchable, and memorable, but they signify more than their physical form. Susuk emas becomes a sign of bodily beauty, attraction, and manipulation; the necklace becomes a sign of destiny and protection; the pusaka becomes a sign of ancestral power and spiritual authority. Through these objects, Balampah constructs a world where material things mediate the relation between the visible and invisible realms.

The representation of Gendis is central. She is not only a character in a horror plot; she is the bearer of inherited cultural debt. Her body and journey carry the consequences of the past. The narrative positions Gendis between the world of her mother, the world of night entertainment, and the village moral order. Therefore, her character becomes a site where the film negotiates questions of women, desire, shame, sacrifice, and redemption.

The concept of marwah is especially important because it links the resolution of supernatural conflict with the restoration of moral honor. Marwah is not presented only as personal dignity; it becomes a social and spiritual category. The film suggests that disorder can be repaired only when honor is restored. This makes Gendis's journey a symbolic journey from inherited pollution toward moral recognition.

The level of reality also includes social relationships. Villagers, elders, religious figures, and production of communal fear show that the supernatural is not experienced individually. It is a collective event. The fear of the community, the anger toward the dance-house, and the anxiety about the past create a social environment in which supernatural explanation becomes plausible. Thus, the film builds a cultural world where invisible forces are part of social reality.

Table 3. Analysis through John Fiske's three semiotic levels

Level	Focus of analysis	Reading of Balampah
Reality	Appearance, gesture, speech, environment, behavior	Banjar cultural world, religious symbols, ritual practices, local objects
Representation	Camera, lighting, sound, editing, narrative, genre	Horror atmosphere and melodramatic structure intensify the cultural conflict
Ideology	Values, myths, moral assumptions, power relations	Moral order, occult consequence, female marwah, ancestral power

At the level of representation, technical and narrative codes intensify these cultural oppositions. Horror lighting, sudden silence, dark interiors, storm imagery, and violent movement turn local belief into cinematic fear. The dance-house is not only shown as a social place; it is framed by sound, shadow, and spectacle to make it feel excessive and dangerous. Meanwhile, religious and communal scenes tend to be associated with stillness, order, and moral certainty.

Camera and framing contribute to this meaning. Close-ups on fear, possessed bodies, magical objects, or distressed expressions ask the audience to read emotion as evidence of supernatural pressure. Wider shots of social space establish the contrast between communal order and personal disturbance. When the camera isolates a character, the text suggests vulnerability. When it groups villagers together, it suggests communal judgment.

Lighting is one of the strongest representation codes in the film. Darkness, low light, and sudden visual disturbance produce the sensation that evil can appear from any corner. These codes are familiar within horror cinema, but in Balampah they are tied to local objects and local speech. This combination makes the fear both generic and culturally specific: the audience recognizes the horror form while also recognizing local signs embedded in it.

Sound design also guides interpretation. The contrast between sacred sound and entertainment sound is repeated as a moral contrast. Silence, screams, thunder, and traditional musical tones work together to organize affect. The audience feels danger before it is fully explained, because the soundscape already prepares a cultural reading. In this sense, sound is not background; it is a semiotic instrument.

Narrative structure shapes meaning. The story begins with disturbance, moves toward inherited consequence, and reaches a resolution through sacrifice. This structure makes the supernatural not a random event but a moral logic. A past ritual produces a present curse; a worldly desire produces an occult debt; and a broken moral order requires spiritual payment. In Fiske's terms, representation codes organize reality signs into a coherent ideological argument.

Dialogue and performance reinforce the same codes. Characters who warn, remember, fear, or explain the ritual function as carriers of cultural knowledge. Their speech provides a bridge between the audience and the belief system represented in the film. Facial expression, bodily resistance, possession scenes, and melodramatic suffering turn abstract cultural values into visible emotion. In this sense, acting becomes a semiotic tool.

The film also uses melodrama to strengthen horror. Love, sacrifice, family debt, and female suffering make supernatural conflict emotionally legible. The audience is invited not only to fear the curse but also to sympathize with the burden carried by Gendis. This mixture of horror and melodrama is important because it allows moral ideology to appear as emotional truth.

The level of ideology is the deepest layer of the analysis. The first dominant ideology is moral binary opposition: religion versus worldliness. The film repeatedly contrasts sacred signs with entertainment and sensuality. This opposition produces a cultural myth that social harmony depends on the separation of religious order from excessive

worldly desire. The thesis source interprets this as a strong dialectic between spiritual value, magical materialism, and the social construction of character.

Table 4. Cultural myths constructed in the film

Cultural myth	Narrative indicator	Ideological message
Religion vs. worldliness	Musala and Qur'anic calm are contrasted with dance-house excess	Harmony requires moral and spiritual discipline
Occult consequence	Susuk, ritual debt, curse, and tumbal	Magical shortcuts produce destruction
Ancestral protection	Necklace, pusaka, guardian presence	Lineage and local power protect the worthy
Female sanctity	Gendis, marwah, sacrifice, moral restoration	Social order is tied to the female body and honor
Ever-present evil	The past returns through inherited debt	Unresolved moral violation continues to haunt the present

The binary does not mean that all culture is rejected. Rather, the film differentiates between culture that supports moral order and culture that is considered dangerous because it is attached to manipulation, lust, or occult ambition. This is why the same local tradition may appear ambivalent. Oral literature and ritual are valuable as heritage, but they become dangerous when connected to desire for power over others.

The second ideology is the myth of occult consequence. Practices associated with susuk, pesugihan, or supernatural attraction are not represented as neutral strategies; they require repayment. The idea of tumbal appears as a cultural explanation for suffering that continues across generations. The horror genre makes this ideology emotionally powerful by showing bodily pain, death, and fear.

The message is clear: shortcuts to beauty, power, or affection through magical manipulation lead to destruction. This myth works as moral discipline, warning the audience about the danger of desire without ethical control. It also reflects a wider cultural anxiety that modern desire, if not controlled by religion and communal norms, may produce moral collapse.

The third ideology concerns ancestral protection and local magical power. Balampah does not simply reject all supernatural belief. It distinguishes destructive black magic from protective ancestral force. The necklace, pusaka, and guardian figures indicate that the unseen world may also become a source of protection when connected with lineage, sacrifice, and moral intention. This distinction reflects the syncretic character of many Indonesian cultural imaginaries, where formal religion, local tradition, and belief in invisible beings coexist in tension.

The fourth ideology concerns redemption and female sanctity. The resolution of the narrative is tied to sacrifice,

sincerity, and the recovery of marwah. On one side, this produces an emotionally strong moral message: love and selfless sacrifice are stronger than destructive magic. On the other side, it also places a heavy symbolic burden on the female character. Gendis becomes the center of moral repair, and the restoration of social order is connected to the restoration of her honor.

This reveals a gendered ideology in which women are often positioned as guardians of collective morality. The body of the woman becomes the place where social purity, shame, temptation, and redemption are negotiated. A critical reading does not deny the emotional strength of the narrative; rather, it shows how the narrative reproduces assumptions that are already familiar in traditional society.

The fifth ideology is the myth of ever-present evil. In Balampah, evil is not eliminated simply by defeating one figure. It is represented as something that can return through desire, memory, inheritance, and unresolved debt. This makes the film culturally effective because it resonates with local horror traditions that imagine the past as alive and active. The past is not gone; it continues to haunt the present until a proper moral settlement is achieved.

Table 5. Consistency of findings across the three analytical layers

Analytical layer	Consistent finding	Cultural interpretation
Representation of signs	Religious symbols are opposed to worldly entertainment	The film constructs a moral boundary in village life
Three semiotic levels	Reality and representation codes lead to ideological reading	Technical film language naturalizes cultural values
Cultural myths	Curse, tumbal, marwah, and ancestral objects reappear	Local horror becomes a vehicle for moral warning
Social function	The film entertains while regulating cultural imagination	Popular cinema acts as cultural education and social control

The semiotic reading of Balampah shows that local horror cinema can operate as a cultural archive. The film preserves and re-circulates oral tradition, mantra, ritual objects, and community anxieties, but it does so through the modern language of cinema. This means that cultural heritage is not merely documented; it is transformed. Once a mantra enters a film, it becomes part of editing rhythm, narrative suspense, sound design, and genre expectation. The result is a new cultural form that is both local and popular.

The film also demonstrates how ideology is produced through repetition of signs. A single religious sign may not automatically create moral ideology. However, when Qur'anic recitation, musala, calm atmosphere, and community order are repeatedly placed against gamelan, dance-house,

seduction, and ritual danger, the pattern produces a moral map. Viewers are guided to identify what is safe, what is dangerous, what is respectable, and what must be redeemed. This is precisely why Fiske's model is relevant: meaning emerges not from isolated objects but from coded relations among signs.

Another important point is the double position of local culture. On the one hand, Balampah celebrates Banjar and South Kalimantan cultural resources by making them central to the film. On the other hand, some cultural signs are framed through horror and moral suspicion. The film therefore does not simply preserve culture; it selects, reorganizes, and judges culture. The audience receives local tradition through a narrative that asks them to feel fear, sympathy, curiosity, and moral caution at the same time.

The gender dimension needs attention. The narrative of marwah can be read as an ethical call to protect dignity. Nevertheless, when the burden of redemption is placed mainly on a female body, the film reproduces a traditional structure in which female sexuality and honor become the measuring point of collective moral order. This does not reduce the value of the film, but it reveals the ideological work of the text. A critical reading allows the audience to appreciate the cultural richness of Balampah while also questioning the gendered assumptions contained in its resolution.

As a social text, Balampah performs a warning function. It tells the audience that spiritual shortcuts, manipulation, and excessive worldliness invite disaster. This message is familiar in Indonesian horror, yet its local articulation makes it distinctive. The use of Banjar cultural signs, local oral memory, and regional myth gives the warning a specific identity. The film becomes a site where local culture enters national popular culture without losing its symbolic texture.

The function of the film is therefore pedagogical as well as entertaining. It provides a moral story about consequences, but it also educates viewers about the existence of local signs and cultural vocabulary. Even when viewers do not fully know the meaning of certain terms or practices, the film introduces those signs through emotion and narrative. Popular film becomes an accessible medium for cultural transmission.

The analysis also shows that horror is a flexible genre. It can express fear of spirits, but it can also express fear of social change, fear of moral decline, fear of uncontrolled desire, and fear of the unresolved past. In Balampah, supernatural terror and social anxiety are inseparable. The ghostly or magical element functions as a language for discussing moral and cultural disruption.

Finally, the article argues that Balampah should be located within the broader development of regional cinema in Indonesia. Regional films are significant because they provide alternatives to Jakarta-centered representation and allow local communities to speak through their own myths, landscapes, accents, and historical memory. However, regional representation also needs critical analysis because every representation chooses certain aspects of culture and leaves others aside. Semiotics helps reveal those choices.

Implications Of Findings

The first implication of the study concerns cultural preservation. Balampah demonstrates that oral tradition can

move from an informal storytelling environment into a modern film form without losing all of its cultural weight. The mantra, the belief in pusaka, the memory of spiritual debt, and the idea of marwah become accessible to audiences who may no longer encounter these elements in daily ritual practice. Film therefore becomes a bridge between older cultural memory and contemporary media consumption.

However, cultural preservation through film is not the same as museum documentation. A film must dramatize, select, compress, and intensify material. This means that every representation is already an interpretation. The filmmaker chooses which elements of culture will become frightening, which will become sacred, which will become beautiful, and which will become morally questionable. Therefore, the preservation function of Balampah should be understood together with its ideological function.

The second implication concerns regional identity. By using a Banjar cultural atmosphere and a South Kalimantan symbolic landscape, Balampah contributes to the visibility of regional cinema. Regional films are significant because they show that Indonesian identity is not singular. It is formed by many local languages, memories, beliefs, and aesthetic traditions. The presence of Balampah encourages local creators to use regional archives as narrative resources rather than only imitating dominant national film formulas.

The third implication concerns media literacy. Viewers need to be able to enjoy Balampah as entertainment while also recognizing the values it circulates. Without media literacy, audiences may receive the moral structure of the film as natural and unquestionable. With media literacy, audiences can ask how the film constructs women, how it defines danger, why certain spaces are coded as sinful, and how local belief is negotiated with religious morality. This critical awareness does not reduce enjoyment; it deepens the viewing experience.

The fourth implication concerns gender representation. The film gives Gendis a central narrative position, but it also connects her fate with inherited shame and social redemption. This structure is common in melodramatic horror, where female suffering becomes a route to collective moral restoration. Researchers and filmmakers should pay attention to this pattern because it may reproduce the idea that women must bear the burden of family honor and spiritual repair. Future film development can keep the emotional power of sacrifice while offering more agency to female characters.

The fifth implication concerns the relation between religion and local belief. Balampah shows that Indonesian cultural life often consists of layered belief systems. Religious symbols, ancestral imagination, and magical objects are not always separated in everyday cultural discourse. The film dramatizes this relation through conflict. This makes Balampah a useful object for communication research because it reveals how popular culture negotiates religious authority, local tradition, and supernatural imagination in a way that is emotionally persuasive.

The social function of Balampah can be summarized as threefold. First, it entertains through the codes of horror and melodrama. Second, it remembers culture by circulating local signs and oral motifs. Third, it regulates morality by linking certain desires and practices to punishment. These three

functions overlap. The viewer is entertained, educated, and disciplined at the same time. This overlap is one of the reasons horror is effective as a cultural genre.

From the perspective of John Fiske, the film also proves that ideology is not located only in explicit dialogue. Ideology appears in camera angle, sound contrast, casting, costume, location, object placement, and the sequence of consequences. For example, when the film repeatedly places sacred calm before worldly chaos, the audience learns a hierarchy of value. When the cursed object produces bodily pain, the audience learns that desire has a price. When redemption requires sacrifice, the audience learns that moral order must be paid for emotionally.

The analysis further indicates that Balampah is built upon a strong pattern of binary oppositions. These include sacred/profane, village/city, tradition/modernity, visible/invisible, protection/destruction, woman as victim/woman as source of disorder, and love/desire. Binary oppositions help simplify complex cultural material so it can be processed by the audience. Yet they also risk reducing culture into a moral dualism. A critical reading must therefore appreciate the clarity of the narrative while remaining aware of what is simplified.

The film also connects local horror with memory politics. The past in Balampah is not a finished period; it returns as a demand. The curse works as a sign that the past has not been properly settled. This is culturally meaningful because many communities understand social conflict, family shame, or spiritual debt as something that may continue across generations. The film converts that cultural logic into a horror structure: the unresolved past becomes a visible and terrifying force.

In relation to production practice, the study suggests that local filmmakers should document the cultural sources behind their films. Interviews with producers, assistant directors, art directors, and cultural informants are valuable because they show how a sign moves from oral culture to screenplay and from screenplay to visual form. Such documentation can protect local knowledge from being reduced to decorative exoticism. It can also become a reference for future researchers and students.

Finally, the article emphasizes that Balampah can be used as a learning material in communication studies, film studies, cultural studies, and semiotics. Students can learn how a film scene is not only a story unit but also a system of signs. They can observe how the same object may have different meanings at different levels: as a physical object at the level of reality, as a dramatic device at the level of representation, and as a moral symbol at the level of ideology.

The practical use of the film in class can begin with a simple activity: identifying the most visible signs in one scene, describing the technical codes that make the scene frightening or emotional, and finally discussing the values that the scene invites the audience to accept. Through this exercise, students can see that meaning is not hidden only in dialogue, but is built through visual composition, sound, character placement, and the order of events.

For local governments and cultural institutions, Balampah also indicates the importance of supporting regional film

production as part of cultural communication. A film based on local archives can promote regional identity more effectively than formal explanation because it presents culture through story, emotion, and visual memory. This potential should be supported by documentation, archiving, screening, and research so that local films become part of a sustainable cultural ecosystem.

The novelty of this article lies in positioning Balampah not merely as an example of local horror, but as a layered cultural text whose signs operate simultaneously at social, technical, and ideological levels. The study does not stop at identifying cultural objects; it asks how those objects are organized into an argument about morality, gender, spiritual debt, and community order. This is the analytical contribution offered by the application of Fiske's framework.

The analysis can also help producers and scriptwriters understand that local signs require careful contextualization. A mantra, pusaka, or ritual object may attract viewers because it feels exotic or frightening, but those signs carry cultural memory and social meaning. When handled carefully, they can enrich the story and strengthen regional identity. When handled carelessly, they may become stereotypes. Therefore, semiotic awareness is useful not only for researchers but also for creative workers.

For the field of communication science, the study confirms that popular film is a legitimate object for examining how meaning circulates in society. The film text functions as a medium where local knowledge meets market logic, aesthetic choice, and audience expectation. Balampah shows that communication is not limited to explicit messages; communication also occurs through atmosphere, silence, fear, rhythm, body movement, and the arrangement of cultural objects on screen.

For the development of local cultural policy, the findings suggest that regional governments may support film not only as promotion but also as cultural documentation. When regional archives, oral literature, and local myths are transformed into film, they become more visible to younger audiences. This visibility can strengthen cultural pride, but it also requires interpretive guidance so that audiences understand the difference between cultural appreciation and uncritical belief.

In short, the film offers an important example of how regional cultural materials can be translated into contemporary media without losing their symbolic depth. Balampah carries a local narrative into the language of cinema, and through that process it contributes to the ongoing negotiation of Indonesian cultural identity. The text is local in its signs, national in its genre, and universal in its themes of desire, fear, guilt, and redemption.

IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis concludes that Balampah represents cultural signs through a dense combination of religious symbols, oral tradition, ritual objects, magical signs, gendered morality, and local horror conventions. At the level of reality, the film constructs a Banjar social world in which piety, entertainment, supernatural desire, and communal judgment coexist. At the level of representation, technical codes such as

lighting, sound, editing, acting, and narrative structure transform those everyday signs into cinematic fear and melodrama. At the level of ideology, the film produces myths of moral opposition, occult consequence, ancestral protection, spiritual redemption, female sanctity, and persistent evil. Balampah is therefore not only an entertainment product but also a cultural text that reproduces and negotiates values within Indonesian society. It preserves local cultural memory while also reorganizing that memory through the moral grammar of horror. The film teaches the audience to read the invisible world as morally structured and to understand social disorder as the consequence of violated spiritual norms. The finding confirms that local horror cinema may function as a medium of cultural preservation, moral warning, and ideological negotiation. For future research, audience reception studies are recommended in order to see whether viewers accept, negotiate, or resist the ideological meanings offered by the film. For filmmakers and cultural institutions, the study suggests that local stories, oral literature, and regional myths should continue to be developed, but they also need to be handled critically. Cultural representation will be stronger when it preserves local identity while opening space for reflection on gender, morality, belief, and social power.

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