

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMALE GAZE IN THE RELIGIOUS HORROR FILM *QODRAT 2*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of the female gaze in female characters in the Indonesian religious horror film Qodrat 2 (2025). The position of women in Indonesian horror cinema is framed in a patriarchal manner. The purpose of this study is to identify the semiotic aspects of the female gaze as an active counter-discourse within the religious horror genre, using qualitative methods grounded in Roland Barthes's semiotic approach. The findings show that the film Qodrat 2 consistently reposition Azizah from a passive trauma victim to an active subject across six interrelated scenes that support her rise from adversity, economic independence, emotional complexity, social participation, agency in the face of threats, and autonomous spiritual resistance.

Keywords: *Female Gaze, Religious Horror Film, Semiotic Analysis, Qodrat 2.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi *female gaze* pada tokoh perempuan dalam film horor religi Indonesia *Qodrat 2* (2025). Posisi perempuan dalam sinema horor Indonesia dibingkai secara patriarkal. Urgensi penelitian ini sebagai identifikasi semiotik *female gaze* sebagai wacana tandingan aktif dalam genre horor religi, melalui metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan semiotika Roland Barthes. Temuan menunjukkan Film *Qodrat 2* konsisten menempatkan ulang Azizah dari korban trauma pasif menjadi subjek aktif dalam enam adegan yang saling menopang kebangkitan dari keterpurukan, kemandirian ekonomi, kompleksitas emosional, partisipasi sosial, agensi menghadapi ancaman, dan resistensi spiritual yang otonom.

Kata Kunci: *Female Gaze, Film Horor Religi, Analisis Semiotika, Qodrat 2.*



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A. INTRODUCTION

Film is an influential medium of mass communication in human life. From the perspective of mass communication, film functions as a medium that disseminates messages to a wide audience and shapes audience meaning-making through the process of interpretation. The messages conveyed by film are not passively received; rather, they are actively interpreted by viewers based on their experiences, backgrounds, and socio-cultural contexts.¹ Film also serves as a medium for representing social reality, a process through which meanings about particular groups are produced, circulated, and consumed by society.² The power of representation in film is not limited to aesthetic dimensions; it also influences the ways in which society perceives itself and other groups.³

One growing trend in Indonesian cinema is religious horror, a subgenre that combines psychological tension with moral messages and religious values. This subgenre is characterized by the struggle between good and evil, the use of sacred verses as spiritual weapons, and the role of religious figures as narrative heroes.⁴ The development of this genre reflects social change and public attitudes toward religion and mysticism. Thus, religious horror films function as mass communication media that construct and reinforce religious values and local cultural identities.⁵ Indonesian religious horror cinema continues to develop, offering not only entertainment but also enriching religious and social discourse through symbolism and narrative.

Within this context, the representation of women becomes an urgent issue to be critically examined. The study by Adiprasetyo and Larasati, which analyzed 559 Indonesian horror films produced from 1970 to 2019, found the dominance of women as the main ghosts in 338 films. Women are systematically portrayed as objects of male desire, sources of social problems, and victims of violence who transform into vengeful spirits.⁶ Hafidz's study of the film *Inang* reveals that the female body in Indonesian horror functions as a locus of fear, temptation, and

¹ Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 67–70.

² Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 25–61.

³ Muhammad Bagus Mustofa, "Fungsi Komunikasi Massa dalam Film," *At-Tawasul: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Dakwah* 10, no. 1 (2022): 5.

⁴ Itsna Nurhayat Effendie, "Film Horor Religi: Antara Hiburan dan Perilaku Beragama," *Radar Sukabumi*, July 21, 2025, <https://radarsukabumi.com/rubrik/artikel/film-horor-religi-antara-hiburan-dan-perilaku-beragama/>

⁵ Onong Uchjana Effendy, *Ilmu, Teori Dan Filsafat Komunikasi* (Bandung: Cipta Aditya Bakti, 2003), 207.

⁶ Justito Adiprasetyo dan Anissa Winda Larasati, "Ketimpangan Representasi Hantu Perempuan pada Film Horor Indonesia Periode 1970-2019," *ProTVF: Jurnal Kajian Televisi dan Film* 6, no. 1 (2022): 21–42.

ambivalence, reflecting patriarchal anxieties about female sexuality and autonomy. Wulandari and Dwiningtyas's study of *Qorin* shows that even when women appear to resist, the film's narrative still places them within a problem frame that requires resolution by male figures.⁷ Pratiwi, Fauziyyah, and Wahyudi further find that religious symbols in Indonesian horror film posters are consistently used to reinforce the image of women confined within domestic and religious spaces.⁸

The representation of women in cinema cannot be separated from the concept of the male gaze introduced by Laura Mulvey. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema constructs women as visual objects to be enjoyed by the heterosexual male gaze, whether through the perspective of the camera, male characters in the film, or the audience.⁹ The logic of the male gaze is not merely an aesthetic choice; rather, it operates as an ideological mechanism that reinforces gender hierarchy through a mode of viewing that is naturalized as a cinematic norm. E. Ann Kaplan extends Mulvey's argument by showing that women are not only positioned as objects in film, but that the cinematic structure itself—including camera position, editing, and scene composition—is organized in such a way as to codify the gaze as inherently masculine.¹⁰

As a critical response to the hegemony of the male gaze, the concept of the female gaze has developed as both an analytical framework and a cinematic practice. Anneke Smelik (1998) defines the female gaze not merely as a gaze from a woman's eyes, but as an orientation of looking that structurally positions women as active subjects within the narrative, with their own desires, motivations, fears, and perspectives, rather than merely as objects to be looked at.¹¹ Jill Soloway (2016) further emphasizes that the female gaze is a way of constructing structural empathy: viewers are invited into the consciousness of female characters so that their struggles are felt from within, not merely observed from the outside.¹² In practice, the female gaze encompasses five elements: female subjectivity in narrative perspective, the emotional and psychological depth of female characters, a camera perspective aligned with female

⁷Reni Wulandari dan Hapsari Dwiningtyas, "Resistensi Perempuan terhadap Dominasi Laki-Laki dalam Film Horor Bertema Religi Qorin," *Interaksi Online* 13, no. 1 (2024).

⁸Sekar Pratiwi, Ifa Bilqiis Fauziyyah, dan Luqman Wahyudi, "Menyingkap Representasi Perempuan dan Simbol Agama dalam Poster Film Horor Indonesia: Melampaui Stereotip," *Brikolase: Jurnal Kajian Teori & Seni* 16, no. 2 (2024): 210–230.

⁹Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

¹⁰E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 23–34.

¹¹Anneke Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 7.

¹²Jill Soloway, "The Female Gaze," Speech at the Toronto International Film Festival, September 2016.

consciousness, the rejection of bodily objectification, and the agency of female characters in driving the storyline.¹³

Recent studies on the female gaze in Indonesian cinema present a landscape that is both compelling and problematic. Mulyati's study of *Yuni* finds that the shift toward narratives of female awakening remains rare and often emerges from female directors, indicating that the filmmaker's perspective directly influences the construction of the female gaze.¹⁴ Rosalind Gill identifies that the strongest sign of a genuine representational shift appears when women are portrayed as agents who make conscious choices, rather than as individuals waiting to be directed or saved.¹⁵ Studies of *Before, Now, and Then* find that the emotional depth of female characters is the most consistent marker of the operation of the female gaze, particularly when women's traumatic experiences are given adequate narrative space. However, these studies remain centered on drama films, none has specifically addressed the religious horror genre, a genre that most intensively mobilizes women's bodies and spirituality as dramatic material.

From the synthesis of the studies above, two significant gaps can be identified. First, empirically, no study has systematically identified concrete semiotic markers that indicate the presence of the female gaze in Indonesian religious horror. Existing studies tend to remain at the descriptive level of representation without tracing how meaning is multilayeredly constructed through specific visual signs. Second, theoretically, there has been no mapping of how the female gaze operates at the intersection of Islamic spirituality and horror narrative, a context with its own ideological dynamics that cannot be equated with secular horror films or drama films. These two gaps constitute the academic justification for the present study.

Empirically, for more than five decades, Indonesian religious horror has remained strongly dominated by the construction of women as objects – whether as objects of fear, objects of desire, or powerless objects of spirituality. The data from Adiprasetyo and Larasati show that, of the 559 films analyzed, only a small number grant genuine agency to female characters.¹⁶ Ideally, gender studies and Islamic communication studies emphasize the need for representations of women that portray the fullness of their humanity as subjects who think, feel, act, and produce meaning, rather than merely as narrative objects that serve the

¹³ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 12-15.

¹⁴ Ikeu Kania Mulyati, "Dekonstruksi Representasi Perempuan dari Sudut Pandang Sutradara Perempuan dalam Film YUNI," *Jurnal Riset Komunikasi* 13, no. 1 (2025): 35.

¹⁵ Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 147-155.

¹⁶ Adiprasetyo dan Larasati, "Ketimpangan Representasi," 30.

development of male characters or generate visual tension. The gap between *Das Sein* and *Das Sollen* thus forms both the point of departure and the urgency of this study. *Qodrat 2*, which premiered on March 31, 2025, attracted more than two million viewers within its first two weeks of release.¹⁷

What makes *Qodrat 2* analytically significant is the claim of representational shift embedded in the film: Azizah is not merely portrayed as a wife waiting for protection, but as a character who struggles independently, participates in social action, and maintains her faith at the most extreme point. This claim requires empirical examination: does what appears to be a shift truly constitute the operation of the female gaze identifiable through concrete semiotic signs, or is it merely an illusion of change that still preserves a patriarchal substrate beneath the narrative surface? This question becomes the central focus of the present study.

Based on this background, this study formulates two research problems: (1) how denotative meanings, connotative meanings, and myths are constructed in the representation of the female gaze through female characters in *Qodrat 2*, and (2) how the meaning of female gaze representation is constructed through visual and narrative signs in the film. This study aims to provide a semiotic map that may serve as a reference for similar research, while also offering an empirical contribution to gender studies and Islamic communication studies in Indonesia.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis. The choice of this method is based on three epistemological considerations. First, the object of this study is an audiovisual text that contains layers of meaning that cannot be reduced to a single category. Therefore, an analytical framework that explicitly accommodates multiple levels of meaning is required. Second, Barthes's semiotics is selected because Barthes specifically develops the ideological dimension of signs through the concept of myth, which is relevant for uncovering the construction of gender as a hidden ideology within film texts. Third, Barthes's semiotic framework enables this study to examine how visual, verbal, and narrative signs operate together in constructing the representation of the female gaze in the film.¹⁸

Barthes distinguishes three levels of signification that operate hierarchically yet remain interconnected. The first level is denotation, which

¹⁷Resla, "6 Fakta Qodrat 2 Raih 2,2 Juta Penonton: Bakal Jadi Trilogi, Vino G Bastian Kini Punya 9 Film Box Office," *Liputan6.com*, April 24, 2025, <https://www.liputan6.com/showbiz/read/6003955/>.

¹⁸Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 109-113.

refers to the literal and descriptive level of meaning, namely what is factually seen and heard. In this study, denotation is operationalized as the description of Azizah's condition, the actions she performs, and the dialogues she delivers in each selected scene. The second level is connotation, which refers to the level of meaning that involves cultural, emotional, and ideological associations that emerge when denotative signs interact with socio-cultural contexts. In this study, connotation is operationalized as the interpretation of bodily expressions, camera movements, visual composition, and the social context surrounding Azizah's actions. The third level is myth, which refers to an ideological system of meaning that is naturalized so that it appears as a universal truth. In this study, myth is operationalized as the discourse on women's position within the gender and spiritual systems constructed by the film.¹⁹

The object of this study is the religious horror film *Qodrat 2* (2025), which was purposively selected based on its relevance as a product of popular culture that received a massive audience response and claims to offer a shift in the representation of women. The primary data were obtained through systematic observation of the film text, including the documentation of scenes, dialogues, visual symbols, and dramaturgical aspects. The secondary data were obtained from books, scholarly articles, and academic journals discussing semiotics, gender, and religious horror films.²⁰

The unit of analysis focuses on six selected scenes chosen through purposive sampling based on six indicators of the female gaze: (1) female subjectivity in narrative perspective, (2) emotional and psychological depth, (3) rejection of bodily objectification, (4) the agency of female characters in driving the plot, (5) autonomous spiritual meaning-making, and (6) gender power relations. The trustworthiness of the data is ensured through triangulation, including direct observation of the film, documentation of scene screenshots and dialogue notes, as well as a literature review from various relevant sources.²¹

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The semiotic analysis of the six selected scenes identifies a consistent construction of signs in shaping the representation of the female gaze in the character of Azizah. These six scenes are categorized into three dimensions of agency: socio-economic agency in Scenes 1-2, physical-emotional agency in Scenes 3-4, and collective-spiritual agency in Scenes 5-6. The following section presents the complete semiotic data.

¹⁹H. Hidayatulloh, *Semiotika Komunikasi* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019), 128.

²⁰Lexy J. Moleong, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Jakarta: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019), 330.


²¹Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2017), 273.

Semiotic Analysis of the Dimension of Socio-Economic Agency

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
 <p>Scene 1: Azizah is welcomed by her friend as she returns to work at the factory after being discharged from the psychiatric hospital</p>	<p>Azizah walks out of the psychiatric hospital with steady steps. She is welcomed by her friend and shakes her hand. The dialogue refers to her return "to work at the factory." Her facial expression appears restrained, while her body movement is directed and purposeful.</p>	<p>This scene signifies an active process of psychological recovery, a conscious effort to rebuild social identity, and an orientation toward the future. The camera follows Azizah's steps and facial expression rather than objectifying her body.</p>	<p>A woman who has experienced mental illness is not defined by her condition. She is empowered and capable of independently returning to social life.</p>
 <p>Scene 2: Azizah pays attention to her friend's instructions at the workplace</p>	<p>Azizah stands upright and attentively listens to her co-worker's explanation. The dialogue shows that Azizah is learning to readjust to her work environment.</p>	<p>This scene connotes seriousness and active involvement in the process of adaptation. It also reflects full cognitive awareness, positioning Azizah as a learning subject rather than someone who merely follows instructions mechanically.</p>	<p>Women possess the capacity to grow through learning processes and social interaction. They are not weak or dependent figures, but individuals who shape themselves through experience.</p>

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of Scenes 1-2: Socio-Economic Agency

Semiotic Analysis of the Dimension of Physical-Emotional Agency

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
	<p>Azizah places her hand on the wall, with her body positioned close to her friend. Her facial expression</p>	<p>This scene signifies situational awareness and an active attempt at self-protection. Her expression does not</p>	<p>Women in horror situations possess strategic sensitivity and caution, rather than merely</p>




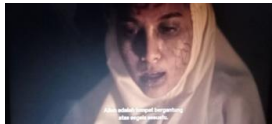
<p>Scene 3: Azizah and her friend stand behind a wall in a dark room</p>	<p>appears tense and alert in the dark space.</p>	<p>merely indicate fear, but also reflects an awareness of the threat that is being perceived and negotiated.</p>	<p>passive weakness.</p>
	<p>Azizah runs through a narrow corridor, breathing heavily, with a tense facial expression and her body leaning forward. The dialogue states, "Azizah! Hey, wait!"</p>	<p>This scene signifies an active effort to save herself. Mobility becomes an autonomous response to threat. Azizah's body moves and determines its own direction instead of waiting for help.</p>	<p>Women in dangerous situations have the capacity to act independently. The myth of women as passive figures waiting to be rescued begins to be challenged.</p>

Table 2. Semiotic Analysis of Scenes 3–4: Physical-Emotional Agency

Semiotic Analysis of the Dimension of Collective-Spiritual Agency

Scene	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
  <p>Scene 5: A mass protest by women in public space</p>	<p>Female characters stand in a line during a protest, with angry and firm facial expressions. The dialogue states, "We will not stop until you release Azizah."</p>	<p>This scene signifies courage, collective resistance, and awareness of injustice. Women possess the will to voice their stance and refuse to submit to oppressive situations.</p>	<p>Women are represented as a social group that moves collectively in public space, possessing place, voice, and power within socio-civil dynamics.</p>
 <p>Scene 6: Azizah remains able to recite a prayer while being</p>	<p>Azizah is shown in a possessed state: her face is tense, her eyes are wide open, and her body is stiff. Her lips continue to recite a prayer:</p>	<p>This scene signifies faith as an internal defense at the most extreme point. The prayer she maintains indicates that Azizah is not completely defeated; rather, she</p>	<p>Women may experience severe inner suffering while still possessing autonomous faith, which does not depend on the</p>

possessed by a "Allah is the One survives through direction or demon on whom all spiritual strength mediation of male depend." that comes from religious figures. within herself.

Table 3. Semiotic Analysis of Collective-Spiritual Agency

Overall, the six scenes demonstrate consistency in the way the film constructs Azizah as an active subject. The female gaze operates through four mutually reinforcing dimensions: the socio-economic dimension in Scenes 1–2, the physical-psychological dimension in Scenes 3–4, the civil-collective dimension in Scene 5, and the spiritual dimension in Scene 6. These semiotic data serve as the basis for the critical analysis elaborated in the Discussion section.

The Female Gaze as a Visual Strategy: Female Subjectivity

The most fundamental finding from the six analyzed scenes is the consistency with which the camera records Azizah's presence. Unlike the mechanism of the male gaze, which Mulvey describes as operating simultaneously through three forms of looking – the gaze of the camera, the gaze of male characters within the film, and the gaze of the spectator – *Qodrat 2* consistently shifts its focus away from the female body as an object of spectacle and toward facial expressions and bodily actions as media of inner expression.²² Karunianingsih explains that a camera operating within the logic of the male gaze tends to adopt a perspective that positions the female body as the center of aesthetic attention.²³ In *Qodrat 2*, this pattern is systematically reversed.

Within Barthes's framework, this cinematic choice is not merely a technical decision, but an ideological act. By rejecting the logic of objectification, the film constructs the connotation that women are not to be looked at as objects, but to be understood from within. This argument is reinforced by Rosalind Gill, who identifies that one of the strongest signs of a representational shift occurs when the camera follows consciousness rather than the contours of the body.²⁴ Scene 4, in which Azizah runs through a corridor, provides the clearest example of this visual strategy. The camera follows the momentum of Azizah's movement from a parallel angle, rather than from a low angle or frontal position that would direct attention to her body. Such camera movement becomes a statement that Azizah's action, rather than her appearance, occupies the center of the narrative.

²² Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 11.

²³ Diyah Ayu Karunianingsih, "Kamera Sebagai Alat Operasi Male Gaze: Analisis Male Gaze Dalam Film Horor Pacar Hantu Perawan," *Rekam* 12, no. 1 (2016): 19–30.

²⁴ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 152.

The Symbol of Women's Awakening

The study conducted by Adiprasetio and Larasati found that women in 559 Indonesian horror films are almost always positioned within a binary framework that leaves little room for alternative representation: they are portrayed either as passive victims or as terrifying supernatural entities.²⁵ By contrast, *Qodrat 2* rejects this binary through Scenes 1 and 2. Azizah's departure from the psychiatric hospital and her active effort to readjust to the workplace are not merely moments of individual recovery. They articulate a new myth: a history of mental illness does not define a woman's capacity to function socially and economically.

Jill Soloway emphasizes that the female gaze is a way of constructing structural empathy; viewers are invited into the consciousness of female characters so that their struggles are felt rather than merely observed.²⁶ The way the film records Azizah's small steps toward a new life fully operates within this logic of structural empathy. Mulyati notes that a shift toward narratives of women's awakening remains rare in Indonesian cinema.²⁷ The findings of this study on *Qodrat 2* directly address that gap: religious horror, a genre that has often exploited women's vulnerability, becomes a space for narrating the courage to return to life.

The Independent Woman as the Face of the Female Gaze

The representation of Azizah's independence through the world of work carries strong theoretical resonance. In her work, Gill finds that the clearest sign of a shift in the representation of women occurs when women are portrayed as agents who make conscious choices, rather than as subjects waiting to be directed.²⁸ Azizah's work activity in *Qodrat 2* is a direct manifestation of this principle: her decision to enter the workplace is not the result of external pressure, but an expression of an inner will that emerges from within herself. The way the camera records Azizah in the workplace directly rejects the logic of the male gaze formulated by Mulvey. Instead of presenting the female body as an object to be evaluated, the camera follows Azizah's actions and decisions as those of a subject who possesses competence and purpose.

Wulandari and Dwiningtyas's study finds that women's resistance in Indonesian religious horror is generally still limited to symbolic and spiritual

²⁵ Adiprasetio dan Larasati, "Ketimpangan Representasi," 35.

²⁶ Soloway, "The Female Gaze."

²⁷ Mulyati, "Dekonstruksi Representasi," 38.

²⁸ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 152.

domains, and has not yet concretely addressed the economic dimension.²⁹ Another study by Pradipta on the film *Sewu Dino* also finds that the dimension of women's economic autonomy remains overlooked in the narrative.³⁰ This study fills that gap by showing that work productivity and the rejection of visual objectification can operate simultaneously as two dimensions of a single representation of the female gaze.

Women as Complex Emotional Subjects

Scenes 3 and 4 place Azizah in situations that are most often exploited by the horror genre to objectify women: a frightening dark space and a chase sequence. However, *Qodrat 2* adopts a different strategy. In Scene 3, Azizah's tense expression is not presented as a symbol of weakness, but as a sign of active vigilance, as she reads the situation and responds to it through measured action. In Scene 4, Azizah's body is not arranged as a spectacle of female panic, but as a sign of action directed toward escaping a threatening situation.

Bell Hooks reminds us that fair representation of marginalized subjects does not merely mean making them visible, but giving them depth and fullness as human beings who carry the past, struggle with doubt, and preserve hope.³¹ Azizah in *Qodrat 2* fulfills this criterion. Her face in Scenes 3 and 4 displays fear, determination, and exhaustion simultaneously, producing a complexity that moves far beyond the stereotype of women in horror as figures who express only a single and predictable form of fear.³² Hafidz's study finds that women's emotions in Indonesian horror are commonly constructed through three recurring patterns: fear, submission, or rescue.³³ *Qodrat 2* rejects these three patterns at once. This is what makes Azizah's emotional depth not merely a technical difference, but an ideological statement.

Khair's research identifies the emotional depth of female characters as the most consistent marker of the operation of the female gaze in cinema.³⁴ This study extends Khair's argument into the context of religious horror. Precisely because this genre so often reduces women's emotions, the presence of emotional complexity in *Qodrat 2* becomes one of its most meaningful representational contributions.

²⁹ Wulandari dan Dwiningtyas, "Resistensi Perempuan," 18.

³⁰ Pradipta, "Representasi Perempuan dalam Film Sewu Dino," *Warta ISKI*, 2024, <https://warta-iski.or.id/index.php/WartaISKI/article/view/277>.

³¹ Bell Hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115–131.

³² hooks, *Black Looks*, 122.

³³ Hafidz, "Representasi Perempuan pada Film Horor Indonesia," 45.

³⁴ Khair, "Female Gaze dalam Film," 62.

Women's Agency: From the Supernatural Realm to the Civil Sphere

Scene 5 presents the most explicit and rarest dimension of the female gaze in the history of Indonesian religious horror cinema. Female characters stand together in a unified line in public space and collectively voice their demand for Azizah's release. This representation positions women not as the visual background of conflict, but as central narrative subjects who actively determine the development of the story.

In an international theoretical context, Carol J. Clover argues that women who confront threats under extreme conditions carry a moral significance that extends far beyond their narrative function.³⁵ However, Clover primarily discusses individual struggle. *Qodrat 2* moves beyond this argument by presenting strength that emerges from bonds among women. Within Barthes's semiotic framework, the line of women standing together in public space constructs a new myth: women are not only capable of surviving individually, but are also able to organize themselves as a real social force.³⁶

Adiprasetyo and Larasati's research finds that across five decades, Indonesian horror films have rarely represented women as an organized civil force.³⁷ A study by the research team from Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe also finds that women's agency in this genre remains largely confined to the supernatural or personal realm.³⁸ Scene 5 in *Qodrat 2* therefore becomes a significant historical anomaly: women's agency is shifted from the supernatural realm to the civil and collective sphere. This affirms that the female gaze in the film operates not only at the level of how women are viewed, but also at the level of what is considered a legitimate source of women's power.

Women's Autonomous Spirituality

Scene 6 is the climax and the most complex moment in the overall construction of the female gaze in this film. Barbara Creed identifies that the female body in horror has historically been positioned as a passive vessel for evil forces—possessed, cursed, and turned into an entry point for threat.³⁹ *Qodrat 2*

³⁵ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 35–41.

³⁶ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 39.

³⁷ Adiprasetyo dan Larasati, "Ketimpangan Representasi," 30.

³⁸ Tim peneliti Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe, "Representasi Perempuan dalam Film Horor Indonesia: Analisis Sosiologi Gender terhadap Stereotipe dan Objektifikasi," *Jurnal Sosio-Edukasi* 4, no. 1 (2025): 120–134.

³⁹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1–7.

begins from the same premise, but fundamentally reverses it: the same body also becomes a source of active and autonomous spiritual resistance.⁴⁰

A study conducted by Intan Wierma Putri finds that women's religious practices in Indonesian religious films are consistently represented as expressions of obedience derived from the direction of male authority figures, such as religious scholars, husbands, or fathers.⁴¹ The finding in Scene 6 is fundamentally different. Azizah's prayer is her own initiative, performed in the most private and extreme moment, without anyone's mediation. Within Barthes's framework, this constructs a new myth: women's faith is not an asset managed by male religious figures, but an autonomous spiritual capacity that becomes the purest form of strength precisely when all external support is unavailable.

Muhammad Bujaya et al., in their Barthesian semiotic study of *Qodrat 2*, identify the strong spiritual dimension of the film. However, their study has not explicitly connected this finding to the perspective of the female gaze.⁴² The present study fills that gap, Azizah's spirituality is not only symbolically powerful; it is also the purest form of female agency in the film, as well as an empirical answer to the question of whether the female gaze truly operates within the genre of Indonesian religious horror.

Wulandari and Dwiningtyas argue that women's resistance in Indonesian religious horror films is often still framed within a logic that ultimately reinforces male authority.⁴³ *Qodrat 2* offers a different model: not the erasure of male figures, but the expansion of space for female subjectivity that operates in a parallel and complementary way. Pratiwi, Fauziyyah, and Wahyudi note that Indonesian religious horror films have historically used spirituality to restrict, rather than women liberation.⁴⁴ The findings of this study show that *Qodrat 2* offers the opposite possibility: spirituality as a domain of autonomous female empowerment.

D. CONCLUSION

At the denotative level, the six scenes portray Azizah as a character who visibly moves, decides, survives, and resists, rather than waits or surrenders. At the connotative level, these scenes construct meanings of consciously chosen

⁴⁰Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 43.

⁴¹Intan Wierma Putri, "Representasi Perempuan Muslim Indonesia: Analisis Representasi dalam Tiga Film Religi," Thesis, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2022,

⁴²Syihabuddin Muhammad Bujaya et al., "Pendekatan Semiotika Barthes dalam Film Horor Religi *Qodrat 2*," *Metamorfosa: Jurnal Kajian Seni dan Budaya* (2025),

⁴³Wulandari dan Dwiningtyas, "Resistensi Perempuan," 18.

⁴⁴Pratiwi, Fauziyyah, dan Wahyudi, "Menyingkap Representasi Perempuan," 220.

recovery, economic independence, complex emotional resilience, organized social solidarity, and faith that originates from within the self. At the level of myth, the film dismantles the construction of women as passive victims, a representation that has dominated the Indonesian religious horror genre for five decades, and replaces it with the image of women as active subjects who possess agency across social, emotional, and spiritual spheres.

The construction of the female gaze in this film operates consistently through cinematic choices that align with female subjectivity. The camera follows Azizah's consciousness and actions rather than objectifying her body. As a result, viewers are invited to understand the female character's experience from within, rather than merely observing it from the outside.

This study makes an empirical contribution to gender studies and Islamic communication studies in Indonesia by providing an initial semiotic map of how the female gaze operates within the religious horror genre. For film practitioners, these findings may serve as a reference for designing more balanced female characters without abandoning the spiritual power of the genre. For scholars, further research using an audience reception analysis approach is needed to examine how female viewers directly interpret this representation.

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