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The state, people, and zombie outbreak: Foucauldian reading of *Zona Merah* series

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ABSTRACT

Background: Indonesian horror cinema has long relied on local ghost figures, while zombies often appear as a borrowed form with weaker cultural intimacy. *Zona Merah* (2024), a Vidio Original series, becomes a strategic case because it shifts horror from the supernatural to a politically managed emergency, where governance operates through discourse, media visibility, and securitized control. **Purpose:** This study examines how *Zona Merah* represents the relationship between the state, the people, and the zombie outbreak, and how it articulates post-Reformasi local power through dynastic politics, oligarchic networks, and institutional capture under crisis conditions. **Methods:** This qualitative study applies scene-based textual analysis combined with Foucauldian discourse analysis. The primary data consists of all eight episodes of Season 1, viewed repeatedly to map recurring crisis discourse and governing practices. The analysis integrates dialogue and visual composition to identify discursive objects, authorized speakers, subject positions, and their practical effects as techniques of rule, including surveillance, scapegoating, crowd management, and decisions over protection and sacrifice. **Results:** *Zona Merah* frames the outbreak as a governance crisis, not only a biomedical event. Local elites control public announcements and TV narratives to shift blame and justify security measures that endanger citizens for elite continuity. Zaenal sustains dynastic power through institutions, media, and business networks, masked by welfare rhetoric. Dyah Ayu uses pastoral care and propaganda to manage consent and legitimize sacrifice, even at her faction's expense. Media works as a regime of truth through "most wanted" framing that disciplines behavior via stigma and fear. Maya and Risang resist, but power also shapes social reality, limiting oppositional claims and systemic change. **Conclusion:** *Zona Merah* depicts crisis as a dispositif where power circulates through discourse, surveillance, and truth-production, enabling elite consolidation while positioning citizens as expendable. **Implications:** This study expands scholarship on Indonesian zombie cinema by showing how the genre can critique crisis governance, biopolitics, and media power in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Zombie, Indonesia cinema, socio-political, power/knowledge, discipline

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INTRODUCTION

Zombies began as folklore tied to the Caribbean, especially to histories of colonial violence, forced labor, and spiritual belief. In Haitian and broader Afro-Caribbean contexts, stories of the living dead grew alongside plantation economies, racial domination, and the extraction of human labor. The zombie figure carried a social memory of bodies treated as property, and of personhood reduced to obedience. It also connected to spiritual cosmologies that framed death, spirit, and agency as unstable boundaries, not fixed facts. Because of that, the zombie was never only a scary creature. It was a cultural sign that condensed fear, power, and coerced work into one body. Over time, that local figure traveled. It moved through colonial imaginaries, travel writing, and early Western popular accounts that often-distorted Caribbean beliefs for exotic spectacle. Then it entered American popular culture through mass media. Early zombie films helped translate the figure into a visual template that audiences could recognize quickly: blank eyes, controlled bodies, and a threat that spreads through contact and proximity. As the figure entered Hollywood, its meanings shifted. The original links to slavery and spiritual control often faded, replaced by new anxieties shaped by modern life, such as pandemics, consumerism, urban crowding, and distrust of institutions.

Zombies now appear across nearly all narrative media and remain culturally mobile because creators can reshape them for different fears, settings, and political moments (Vétu, 2021). Zombies have this kind of flexibility that comes from a multi-origin of the meaning.

Zombies' adaptability explains why the undead continue to walk among the living. They always take on a new meaning as they move around through popular culture, not bound to a single origin of meaning. Thus, the zombie operates as a modern myth that keeps on renew itself (Vargas-Iglesias, 2022).

Film becomes the most ideal medium from the zombies keep on living. Film gives the zombie a rhythm, a body, a logic, and an atmosphere. It also gives institutions a stage. Cameras can show checkpoints, uniforms, quarantines, broadcasts, sirens, and crowds at once. That audiovisual capacity makes zombie cinema well suited for social and political questions. Zombie films often do more than entertain. They can dramatize how authorities define danger, how societies split into "safe" and "unsafe," and how fear reorganizes everyday life. Even when a zombie narrative starts as spectacle, it can still carry arguments about governance, crisis management, and the limits of protection. For that reason, zombie cinema has evolved into a form that can speak to socio-political issues in many places, not only where the genre first popularized (Strickland, 2019).

Global zombie cinema also shows that the genre does not need one political message. It can support multiple readings because it commonly sets a crisis that forces public decisions. Who gets rescued. Who gets abandoned. Who gets

blamed. Who gets listened to. In many films, the most frightening element is not the zombies alone. It is the social order that forms around the undead. Zombie narratives often produce a pressure cooker. They intensify questions of authority and trust, and they test how communities react when institutions claim emergency powers. That is why zombies keep returning as a cultural figure. They offer a story machine for thinking about collapse, control, survival, and moral boundaries.

In Indonesia, however, zombie do not hold the same cultural centrality as local supernatural figures. Indonesian horror has long relied on ghosts and spirits that already live in shared cultural memory. *Kuntilanak, Pocong, Genderuwo*, and other local beings feel familiar because they link to everyday belief, oral stories, and religious or mystical imaginaries. Many Indonesian horror films also build fear through moral frames that audiences already recognize. These frames connect to places, rituals, and social norms that feel close. In contrast, the zombie often arrives as a borrowed figure, historically associated with Caribbean folklore and later shaped by Western genre traditions. For many viewers, it can feel less intimate. It can feel less connected to local fear structures, even when filmmakers try to adapt to it.

Yet the zombie has appeared in Indonesian cultural production, and it has not always appeared as pure imported spectacle. In fact, one of the earliest and most striking Indonesian uses of zombie as social critique emerged in literature rather than film. Seno Gumira Ajidarma's "Grhhh!" from the 1993 short story anthology *Penembak Misterius*, stands as a key example. The story links the zombie to state violence during the New Order periode, particulary the Petrus terror of 1983-1985. In Ajidarma's hand, the zombies become the representation of the victims who return from the grave to seek revenge. Their return carries memory, grievance, and unfinished justice. The undead body becomes a form of social accusation. Through this metaphor, "Grhhh!" shows the zombie can translate Indonesian political trauma into a horror form that remains legible and disturbing.

Compared with other horror subgenres, Indonesian zombie cinema remains marginal in two clear senses: output and genre ecology. The number of local zombie titles stays small and discontinuous, and critics note that filmmakers rarely treat zombies as a sustained production cycle (Gasella, 2015; Irfani, 2018). This marginality appears in the limited trail of works across the last decade, such as *Kampung Zombie* (2015), *Reuni Z* (2018), *Hitam* (2021), and the Vidio original series *Zona Merah* (2024). In a horror landscape dominated by local ghost mythologies, *Zona Merah* becomes a strategic case because it shifts horror from the supernatural into a politically managed crisis, where power operates through control of information, security apparatuses, and public consent (Adiprasetio, 2023; Annissa & Adiprasetio, 2022). Despite this potential,

zombie films in Indonesia have developed more slowly than other horror subgenres. This slow development can be understood in at least two practical ways. First, the output remains limited. The Indonesia zombies' films appear only occasionally, not through sustained and consistent production. Second, they have lower visibility compared to the dominant horror forms. Producers, distributor, and the marketing ecosystem in Indonesia tend to promote what is already profitable. Ghost centered horror films have a proven track record, strong audience, and an easy repeatable formula to produce. When producers "play safe," they repeat narrative templates that have already proven profitable, which can lead to repetition across the genre (Marwantika, 2021). In that context, zombie films could offer a fresh variant of horror. However, their production remains limited, with only a small number of titles, as mentioned above.

Authors see *Zona Merah* (2024) as reimagining the zombie outbreaks as a metaphor, even an allegory, for the Indonesia local governance post-reformasi. The political dynasties and oligarchic that seize control of regional institutions, shape the public opinion through media narratives, and crack down the dissent amid crises are a fragment from the past that still remains. And what makes it stand out is just not another zombie flick. *Zona Merah,* spotlights state-citizen dynamics and weaves the political struggles right into the pit of survival. The series presents the crisis not merely as a natural disaster or random infection. It frames crisis as a contest over narratives, legitimacy, and control. It places the audience inside a social world where public order, media messaging, policing, and elite maneuvering intersect with horror. This approach suggests that the series redefines the genre locally, not by changing the zombie's biology, but by shifting what the zombie outbreak organizes as a story problem. The outbreak becomes a governance problem. It becomes a conflict over who gets to speak, who gets to name the threat, and whose solutions become acceptable.

Moreover, scholarly studies on Indonesian zombie films remain underdeveloped—likely due to the limited number of local productions within the genre. Nonetheless, two relevant studies intersect with this research. The comparative representation of zombies in the American British film Pride and Prejudice and Zombies and the Korean film Kingdom: Ashin of the North (Syamsuar et al., 2022). Employing Comparative Literature and Manga Matrix theory, the study highlights how cultural force, striking visual aesthetics, and narrative structures profoundly shape zombie storytelling. The second study unravels the zombie symbolism via cognitive studies in South Korean cinema (Lee, 2019). In her work *The New Zombie Apocalypse* and *Social Crisis in South Korean Cinema,* Lee concludes that the zombies symbolize collective trauma, social injustice, and the state's that failed to manage the crises.

Neither Syamsuar, Assilmia, and Lee explore the zombies in the Indonesian context, especially in the relation between the state, the people, and the outbreak. This opens a great chance, a gap for this study to add some real contextual value. By bringing a fresh viewpoint to scholarly discussions of how Indonesian social and political challenges play out through zombie imagery, while enriching the conversation on Indonesia zombie cinema. To analyze this phenomenon, the study will draw on Michel Foucault's ideas, particularly in power and knowledge dynamics. In *Zona Merah*, the zombie or *mayit* functions as a discursive element through which power/ knowledge is organized: officials define the outbreak, circulate the truths via media, and turn them into method of population management, from surveillance and scapegoating to biopolitical choices about who must be protected and who can be sacrificed.

We'll explore it by using Michel Foucault's framework, focusing on his ideas about power and knowledge. This choice fits the series because *Zona Merah* repeatedly shows that crisis does not only involve bodies and contagion. It also involves statements, classifications, and institutional decisions. As for Foucault power does not function mainly as something someone owns. Power plows through almost our everyday habits, organizations, and interactions like a web of connections. Power does not only repress. It also produces. Producing the knowledge, norms, and identities that shape what people can do and how they understand themselves. From this angle, knowledge does not simply reflect reality. It helps construct reality by defining what counts as true, reasonable, safe, or dangerous (Foucault, 1975).

This point matters for zombie narratives because outbreaks require clear facts right away. Officials need to explain what the threat is, how it spreads, and what the public must do. The definitions then justify concrete actions like quarantine, policing, evacuation, and exclusion. Zombie stories therefore stage the production of truth as a dramatic problem. Who gets believed. Which explanation dominates. Which bodies become targets. In many outbreak narratives, media plays a central role in circulating official truth and stabilizing public perception. That process aligns with Foucauldian questions about regimes of truth, authorized speech, and the link between knowledge claims and governing techniques.

Foucault also develops the concepts of discipline and surveillance to explain how modern power operates at a micro level. Discipline shapes conduct through routines, rules, spaces, and normalization. Surveillance supports discipline because the possibility of being watched can push people to regulate themselves. Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor for this logic, where visibility becomes a mechanism that leads individuals to internalize control (Foucault, 1975). In outbreak narratives, this logic appears through checkpoints, controlled zones, records,

screenings, and the policing of movement. It also appears through mediated visibility, such as broadcasts that label certain bodies as threats or criminals. These techniques can shape population behavior without constant brute force. They can work through fear, rumor, and public stigma.

In this study, the Foucauldian framework does not serve as a generic "ideology critique." It supports a more specific task. It helps trace how discourse in *Zona Merah* produces objects of knowledge, such as the zombie the *Zona Merah* (red zone), and claims about safety and order. It helps identify who becomes authorized to speak, such as officials, media hosts, security actors, and selected "experts" inside the story. It also helps track how these truth claims lead to real world consequences, such as scapegoating, stricter policing, and biopolitical choices about who gets protection and who is left vulnerable. These questions place state-people relations at the center of the analysis. They also explain why a zombie series can offer an alternative view of Indonesian socio-political dynamics. The outbreak forces power relations to become visible, speak able, and contestable inside the narrative.

In short, zombies operate as more than monsters in this context. They function as narrative technology that pressures society's political imagination. In Indonesia, zombie cinema remains marginal in output and visibility, but *Zona Merah* signals a strategic shift. It treats the outbreak as a governance problem and uses the horror form to stage discourses of authority, truth, and crisis management. Thus, as mentioned before, this study responds to a gap in scholarship by bringing the Indonesian case into zombie screen studies and by using a Foucauldian lens to examine how the series constructs relations between state and people under emergency. Through that focus, the study aims to expand discussion of Indonesian zombie representation and to show how local socio-political tensions can shape the genre's meaning and function within national screen culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research supports in-depth understanding of complex social and cultural phenomena by prioritizing contextual, descriptive interpretation rather than numerical measurement (Renjith et al., 2021; Teherani et al., 2015). In media studies, qualitative approaches are commonly used to examine how audiovisual texts organize narratives, produce categories, and structure relations of authority and conduct (Flick, 2020). In this study, "qualitative" refers to a scene-based textual approach, not ethnographic work. It focuses on represented practices and discursive operations within the series, rather than participants lived experiences (Lim, 2025). This study uses a qualitative scene-based textual analysis combined with Foucauldian discourse analysis to examine how *Zona Merah* constructs the outbreak as a problem of governance. The primary data consist of all eight episodes of Season 1 (Episodes 1–8), analyzed through

repeated close viewing to capture the full arc and repetition of crisis discourse and governing practices across the season.

Data collection followed three steps. First, I segmented the season into scenes and documented each selected scene with precise timecodes. The scene then selected to capture the series' core themes. The chosen scenes are Episode 1 (21:48), Episode 2 (43:32), Episode 5 (21:16), Episode 6 (48:56), Episode 7 (03:09). Second, I compiled multimodal evidence from each scene: dialogue transcripts, screenshots and visual notes. Visual notes covered framing, camera distance and angle, composition, blocking and spatial hierarchy, mise-en-scène. The dialogue transcription functioned as a documentation tool to track truth-claims and authorized speech, not as the sole unit of analysis. Analytically, the study follows Kendall and Wickham's Foucauldian approach by mapping three layers. First, it identifies key discursive objects that organize the crisis, such as zombies, infection, red zone, safety, and order, including recurring truth-claims attached to them. Second, it maps authorized speakers and subject positions produced by the narrative, such as officials, citizens, threats, saviors, criminals, and victims, including how authority is performed and stabilized through institutional settings and mediated visibility. Third, it traces the practical effects of those truth-claims as techniques of rule, such as scapegoating via media, surveillance and policing, crowd control, evacuation, and biopolitical decisions over protection and sacrifice. Interpretation integrates verbal, visual, and aural evidence within the same scene to treat discourse as an operational practice rather than ideological decoding (Kendall & Wickham, 1999).

Secondary sources were retrieved via Google Scholar, Scopus, and journal portals using keywords such as "Indonesian zombie cinema," "Indonesian horror film," *"Zona Merah* Vidio," "governmentality," "biopolitics," "power/knowledge," "regime of truth," and "media discourse in crisis." Sources were included only if they directly supported the scene-based codes and Foucauldian concepts applied in the analysis and excluded if they were too general or could not be mapped to specific scenes and coded themes. Methodological rigor was supported through an audit trail of timecoded notes, transcripts, and screenshots, multimodal triangulation within scenes, and iterative refinement of a codebook across episodes. Peer debriefing on key scenes was used to reduce interpretive bias and to keep claims anchored to audiovisual evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Power is not a static possession of individuals or institutions but a dynamic relationship that operates within social interactions. Power is not merely repressive; it is also productive, generating knowledge, subjects, and norms that regulate the behaviour of individuals and groups (Foucault, 1975).

In a Foucauldian sense, knowledge is not simply held by institutions but is produced

within discursive practices and power relations that define what can be said, by whom, and with what effects. Institutions such as medicine, psychiatry, and the media function as sites where "regimes of truth" are stabilized and circulated, shaping how populations are governed and how subjects are formed (Foucault, 1980). Discipline manifests through rules and norms that control both the body and individual behaviour. Foucault employs the metaphor of the panopticon to illustrate how surveillance leads individuals to internalize power, making them voluntarily comply with regulations (Foucault, 1975).

Also from Foucault framework, the system on control and information is especially important in understanding modern issues, such as how media develops perceptions of truth, how sexual orientation is formed through social standards, or how advanced education set up inconspicuous however viable shapes of control (Foucault, 1975).

In zombie films, the state often shapes the outbreak narrative. It defines who counts as a threat and tells society how to respond. This approach connects power to knowledge. Drawing on Foucault, zombie stories let us explore how discourse, surveillance, and security practices produce social control during crisis.

Zombies are portrayed as a mindless undead that resurrected from the grave, characterized by their crude and primitive nature compared to other horror figures (Ekinci, 2022). The term "zombie" probably comes from words zonbi, jumbie, zumbi, or nzambi, which are linked to spirits or the dead or someone who declared dead and buried but later found alive in an unconscious vacant state. The word zombie had appeared in Haiti around the 1780s as a part of a mythical folklore tradition that emerged in the colonial era, particularly in the Caribbean islands shaped by the harsh realities of oppression and (Wagner, 2016).

Zombies continue to be an enduring cultural icon, capturing and reflects the social fears and anxieties that persist across generations (Krautkrämer, 2023). Also, zombies reflect, respond to, and mythologize fears related to colonial practices (McAlister, 2012). Zombies are more than horror figures. They often symbolize human powerlessness under oppression. They also carry links to slavery and rebellion, acting as both victim and sign of resistance (Datta, 2021). Thus, zombie as a multifaceted cultural construct—functioning simultaneously as a metaphor, symbol, allegory, icon, and even as a sociological category (Khan, 2023).

Zombies entered Western popular culture through literature, then film. *White Zombie (1932),* directed by Victor Halperin, is widely cited as the first zombie film. It presents zombies in a Haitian setting, revived through voodoo and controlled by a master.

A significant shift in zombie representation occurred with *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968 by George A. Romero, which introduced the modern version of zombies, a reanimated corpses because of infection or scientific

experimentation. Romero established the concept of flesh-eating zombies, which became a defining feature of zombie films.

A zombie film is defined by several key characteristics that can be grouped into categories. The most fundamental feature is the return of the dead, with most zombie films featuring the reanimation of corpses due to virus outbreaks or scientific experiments (Bishop, 2010). In contemporary cinema, zombies are often depicted as a product of disaster or trauma. Whether originating from legacies of enslavement, viral epidemics, failed medical experiments, or a large biblical apocalyptic event—highlighting their deep connections into the narratives of crisis, fear, and unresolved horror (Dalton & Potter, 2018). Zombie movie commonly reflects the fears of the social breakdown by showing post-apocalyptic worlds destroy by the zombies' outbreaks (Bishop, 2010). Zombies function as a strong and powerful metaphor to reflect contemporary issues. In the movies they are often used to criticize consumer culture, represent the spread of the disease, or symbolize marginalized communities, highlighting how they are continuously used to interpret and respond to the sociopolitical conditions of a particular era (Filho, 2020). Zombie movies have become an important part of modern popular culture, functioning and serve as a medium for expressing and examining social fears, risks, and anxieties are explored (Wonser & Boyns, 2016).

For example, Train to Busan in 2016 addresses the issues of social class and corruption during emergencies (inequality and corruption), while Dawn of the Dead in 1978 portrays zombies that wander through a shopping mall to criticize consumerism. Overtime, zombies have developed into a very complex cultural symbol with implications that go much beyond their original context (Vervaeke et al., 2017). The zombie subculture has spread the infection into the pop culture through film and literature (Dipple, 2015).

In the Indonesian horror cinema, the zombie still remains as a subgenre that struggling for a place. This is quite interesting, especially when considering how much the Indonesian film industry has grown over a decade and how local film production continues to develop in a new way (Puspitasari et al., 2024). This phenomenon is closely related to the historical, cultural, and the industrial force that have shaped the Indonesian cinema for a long periode. Local ghosts such as *Kuntilanak, Pocong, Siluman,* and *Genderuwo* have remained as the main figures in Indonesian horror cinema, from classic titles like *Pengabdi Setan* (1980) to mass hits like *KKN di Desa Penari* (2022). This is understandable because belief in the mystical still play an important role in the everyday life for many Indonesians. As a result, these figures often create a sense of fear that feels beyond mere entertainment. They connect directly to lived experience.

This is the reason why zombies still often feel unfamiliar to Indonesian audiences. Unlike the local ghost above, zombies have no

emotional or historical connection, even though Indonesian society also shaped by colonial experience and its own complex social history. Cultural distance, however, is not the only challenge. Another major factor is production constraint. Zombie movies usually demand a more complex technical treatment such as action choreography, makeup design, and strong visual effects execution.

The history of Indonesia cinema has also contributed to the limited and sometime the absence of the zombies in the national cinema. This can be traced back to the New Order era, the period of government in Indonesia that began after the end of the Old Order in 1966 and continued until 1998 (Novianto et al., 2024).

During this period, the New Order regime maintained strict control over the media and sharply limited freedom of speech. The centralized system of power also intensified corruption, collusion, and nepotism across different levels of the government (Ganie-Rochman & Achwan, 2016). The New Order regime exercised strict control over press and other forms of media, heavily censoring news and information critical of the state (Widyatama, 2018). During the New Order regime, film functioned as a powerful tool to shape public memory and promote a state-controlled narrative (Adiprasetio, 2023). As a result, all media production, particularly cinema operated under the tight supervision of the Ministry of Information, directed by the coordinating minister for Political and Security Affairs.

The government's tight control of film themes has limited the development of the stories that carried a direct social (Irawanto, 2023). In such context, the zombie subgenre which often depicts social breakdown, institutional collapse, and the government incompetence in a crisis would have had little room to grow. Within a film industry closely monitored by the state, narratives of that kind were difficult to sustain. As a result, the horror movies that gained prominence were generally those that stayed away from political commentary and instead drew heavily on a rural folkore, especially rooted in Javanese communities (Annissa & Adiprasetio, 2022).

After the fall of the New Order regime, greater creative freedom in Indonesia cinema slowly opened space for the exploration of new themes. In this changing context, the zombie movies can be seen as having strong potential as a vehicle for social criticism, especially because zombie often works as an allegory for collective fears and anxieties such as the fall of civilization, identity crises, and public distrust in government institutions (Bishop, 2010).

Within the landscape of Indonesia horror cinema, zombies need to function as more that revived bodies from the grave. They must embody historical trauma, social tension, and political anxiety that feel relevant to the Indonesian experiences and collective fears. When handled well, the zombie subgenre can offer more than a mere entertainment. It can be a meaningful form of social reflection as

Table 1 List of Episodes of *Zona Merah* (2024)

Episode	Title	Duration	Synopsis
1	*Selamat Datang* (Welcome)	53:26	Maya panics when her younger brother, Adi, mysteriously disappears amid the outbreak of the undead in Rimbalaya.
2	*Mayat* (Corpse)	55:58	Maya meets Risang, a young journalist from Jakarta investigating Regent Zaenal.
3	*Adu Rencana* (The Tactics)	53:57	Risang found a shocking secret linking Zaenal to the zombie outbreak. Meanwhile, Adi discovers a way to defeat the zombie.
4	*Hari Buruh* (May Day)	51:56	The number of zombies rises. Maya and her group search for a way to stop the zombies while struggling to survive from all the drama.
5	*Infeksi* (Infected)	51:51	One of the group members is infected, forcing them to make a difficult and hard decision. The conspiracy behind the outbreak begins to unravel one by one.
6	*Arah Baru* (New Direction)	55:31	Maya and Risang find undeniable evidence connecting Zaenal to the outbreak. They plan their next move to expose the truth.
7	*Bertahan* (Survive)	48:23	Dyah Ayu devises a ruthless plan, using the people of Rimbalaya as bait for the undead.
8	*Zona Merah* (The Red Zone)	01:01:23	Maya, Risang, Zaenal, and the remaining survivors race to escape before the only exit is destroyed.

Source: Author, 2025

suggested by the series *Zona Merah.*

Zona Merah premiered on November 8, 2024, on Vidio, consists of eight episodes as seen from the Table 1. The series is produced by Screenplay Films and directed by (Tata & Santosa, 2024). The series stars Aghniny Haque as Maya, Andri Mashadi as Risang, and Devano Danendra as Adi. Set in the fictional city of Rimbalaya, Central Java, *Zona Merah* follows the journey of Maya, a factory worker, in her desperate search for her younger brother, Adi, who mysteriously disappears amid the outbreak of the zombie. At times, Maya crosses paths with Risang, a journalist investigating corruption involving the Regent of Rimbalaya, Zaenal. As the city descends into a morbid chaos and is declared a red zone *(zona merah)*, Maya and Risang must fight for survival, facing not only zombies but also a political conspiracy.

From Episode 1, *Zona Merah* frames the state as a tool for elite interests, not public protection. Regent Zaenal's dynastic politics show how oligarchic power relies on control of media and the local economy, then gets transferred to the next generation. This appears clearly in Zaenal and Risang's exchange at 21:48.

The scene from Figure 1 represents the concepts of power. In Foucauldian terms, Zaenal does not "own" power. The scene shows power as relations and techniques that create an authority effect. Zaenal becomes a nodal point within a disposition: the rehabilitation facility as institutional space, uniformed bodies as disciplined presence, and controlled visibility through who stands where, who

Source: Vidio, 2024

Figure 1 Episode 1 (21:48)

speaks, and who watches. This fits Foucault's microphysics and disciplinary power, where space, normalization, and surveillance shape conduct. The scene and the dialogue from figure 1 help stabilize these practices as "truth," until Risang's questions disrupt the regime of truth that supports Zaenal's authority effect. Regent Zaenal:

> "Therefore, I promise to create the best programs for our beloved people of Rimbalaya."

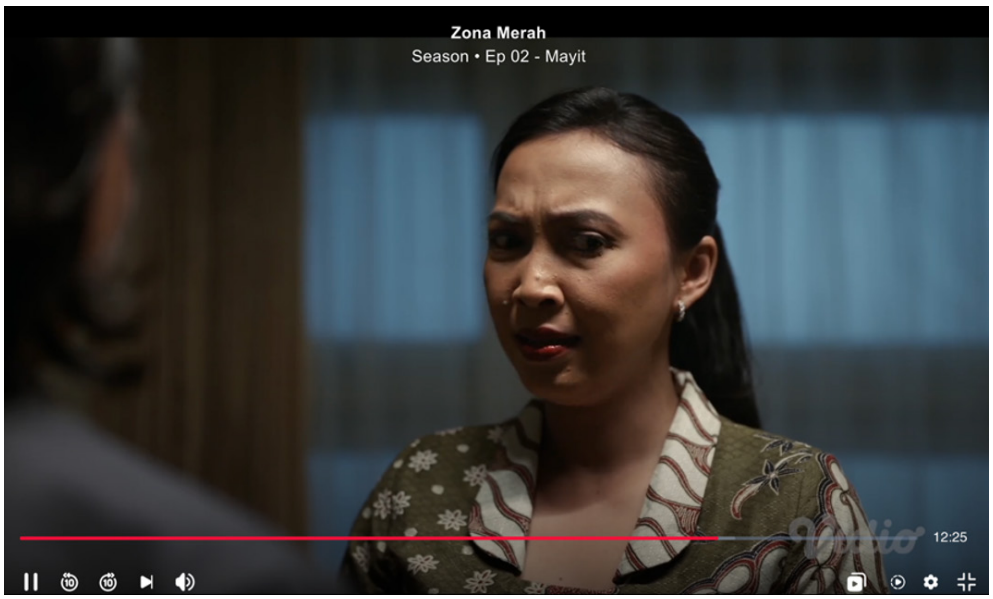
Risang:

> "If Mas Dandy, your son, becomes the next Regent, that means your family will have served for 20 years. That's quite extraordinary. Or perhaps what you mean is that if Mas Dandy takes office, Panti Rebah will continue to operate—along with its business units, such as the factory, local television station, minimarkets, and small businesses—all of which are registered under your family's name?"

Foucault argues that power operates through discourse, shaping what people come to accept as the truth. In this dialogue, Regent Zaenal uses the language of public service and development to normalize his rule and hide exploitation behind welfare promises. Risang challenges this framing by revealing how control continues through dynastic succession, supported by family-linked business networks and local institutions.

The scene does not frame power as inherited property. It shows dynastic politics reproducing the same configuration of power relations through institutional access, media visibility, and economic networks. Welfare rhetoric then presents this arrangement as legitimate "continuity," so what persists is the disposition and its authority effects, not owned power. This mechanism shapes the field of possible action by normalizing a regime of truth around "continuity" and "service," producing compliant subjects and making alternatives seem less credible in public discourse.

In Figure 2 (time code: 43:32–44:27),



Source: Vidio, 2024

Figure 2 Episode 2 (43:32-44:27)

the close-up framing centers Dyah Ayu as the authorized speaker and limits the viewer's access to the wider situation. Her gaze toward an off-screen interlocutor sets an asymmetric interaction where she controls the exchange. Her restrained facial expression performs "care" in a calculated way, while her neat, patterned blouse codes bureaucratic respectability and elite status. The low-key lighting and minimal, blurred background shift the encounter into a private negotiation space, emphasizing persuasion and subject-management rather than a public, transparent interaction, as follows:

Dyah Ayu (Deputy Regent):

> "Hello, Mbak Maya. How are you? Have you eaten? Were you able to rest?"

Maya:

> "You're the Deputy Regent, right? What do you need from me?"

Dyah Ayu (Deputy Regent):

> "I'm so glad someone recognizes me. I rarely appear on camera, and I'm hardly ever interviewed."

Maya: "So?"

Dyah Ayu conversation with Maya shows that the state, through its representatives, governs people not just by oppressive measures like police arrests but also by means of welfare management and care discourses. When Dyah Ayu asked Maya, "Hello, Mbak Maya, how are you? Have eaten? "Were you able to rest?" It seems sympathetic, but is a articulation of pastoral power, rather than just a statement of sympathy. Government functions by providing and protecting the people but also keeping them under control under a welfare narrative.

When Dyah Ayu claims that she rarely is in front of the cameras, it's possible she played a strategy of governmentality. Which illustrates how the government controls perception to establish legitimacy. She constructs herself as a clean and genuine leader who isn't motivated by a desire for power by presenting herself as

a person who isn't frequently featured in the media.

Maya's skeptical reply, "And?", signal a refusal to the power discourse. Maya did not accept Dyah Ayu's narrative as a savior; she maintains a critical stance toward Ayu's. This moment shows that individuals who are subjected to power still possess the potential to disrupt the mechanisms of biopolitics being imposed upon them.

In the third episode (time code: 18:37), Dyah Ayu, is shown speaking with a serious expression while holding a cup of tea. The scene shows that she's in control, powered by the domestic setting and her calm words while performing ordinary composure. Rather than see the teacup as a symbol, this scene is showcase of how power operates through a moderated tone, controlled bodily conduct, and an intimate setting that enables persuasion and recruitment without overt coercion (Foucault, 1991).

The scene further demonstrates how discourse constructs character identity and social interactions as reflected by this dialogue, Dyah Ayu:

> "Mbak Maya, please have a seat. Every element of Rimbalaya life is under Zaenal's control. He has complete control over us and can kill us whenever he wants. For that reason, we must defeat him. And about Adi, I will handle that."

Maya:

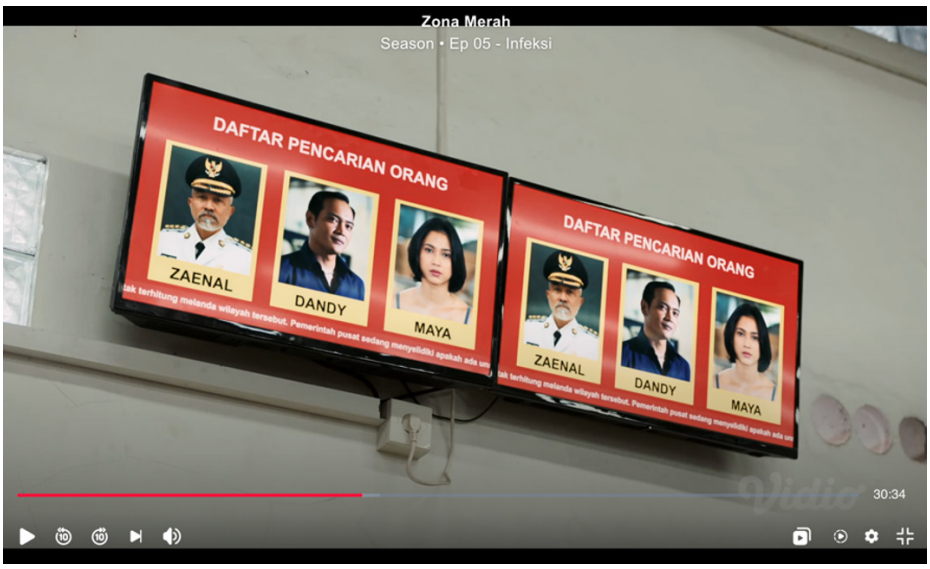
> "That's impossible. There's no way I'll gather a mass movement to overthrow Zaenal."
> Dyah Ayu's statement, "We are nothing more than livestock that he can slaughter at any time,"

reveals how people become objects of power. Elite politics treats the people as a resource to manage and when necessary: sacrificed. In Foucauldian perspective, modern power governs the population by deciding who deserves protection and who can be exposed. Zaenal's control over "every aspect of life" in Rimbalaya signals dominance across social, political, and economic spheres.

The metaphor of livestock makes the hierarchy of power unmistakable. The state operates not only through law and force but also through the regulation of welfare, access to economic, and public institutions to discipline the population and secure obedience. Thus, people's fate depends on elite decisions.

Even though Dyah Ayu opposes Zaenal, the dialogue points to a continuity of power rather than a real break from it. The same logic of power endures, regardless of who sits at the top. Dyah Ayu presents herself as the solution while working through narrative control and institutional dominance, which keeps the structure intact.

Dyah Ayu's give her words to "take care of Adi" can also be interpreted as a strategic act of power negotiation, in which Maya drawn in through the offer of personal benefit and en couraged to align herself with Dyah political agenda. This suggests how power does not always operate through direct coercion but also through co-optation and persuasion.



Source: Vidio, 2024

Figure 3 Episode 5 (21:16)

In Episode 3 (Figure 3, 21:16), a television screen displays a "Most Wanted" list featuring Zaenal, Dandy, and Maya. In Foucauldian perspective, this scene reflects panopticons, in which public visibility produces the sense of constant surveillance, so people regulate themselves. The list also functions as a social control through stigma and exclusion, not only legal pursuit. The media operates as an instrument of power and a regime of truth. It outlines who counts as a threat and fixes their public image to secure institutional power.

By presenting these individuals as the spurce of the outbreak, the state can justify its repressive measures and spread fear among the public. This reflects with the idea of biopolitics, where the state manages populations not just through laws and security forces but also through controlling the narratives that determine who deserve protection and who must be sacrificed. As Kartal (2023) assert that in the Foucauldian perspective in times of crisis, power shifts from legal and military force to stethoscopes and statistics.

This episode also marks a crucial turning point in the series, as it reveals Dyah Ayu's motivations for bargaining with Maya. The shift becomes clear when Seno tells Zaenal that, "The police have been ordered to arrest us by Dyah Ayu. The Regent's office has been taken over, Sir." This highlights that Dyah Ayu has betrayed them and is taking full command of the police.

In this episode, to survive, Maya and Risang are compelled to join forces with Zaenal. At the same time, Maya, Risang, and Zaenal, who were previously in conflict, now realize they are merely pieces of pawns in a much larger political game orchestrated by Dyah Ayu.

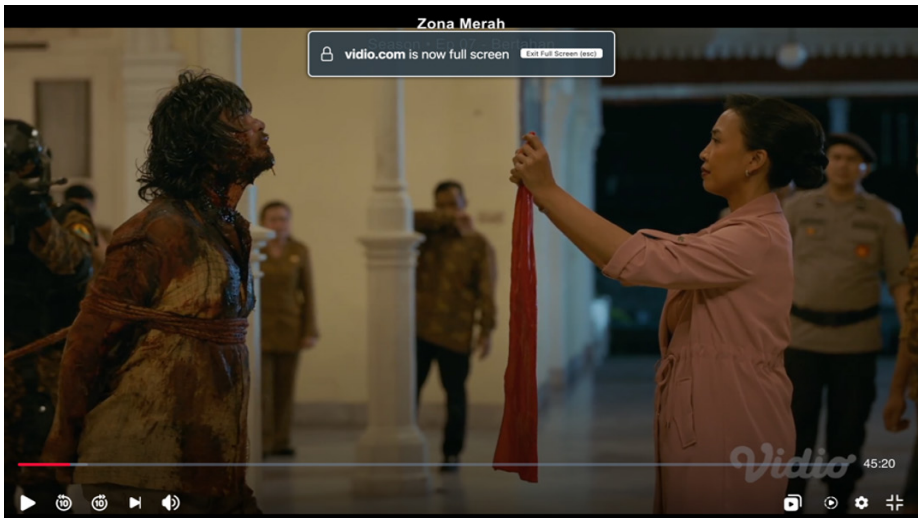
In the scene from Figure 4 (time code: 48:56), Dyah Ayu who is surrounded by security forces, dressed in pink, is seen communicating to a restless crowd. With seemingly empathetic

Source: Vidio, 2024

Figure 4 Episode 6 (48:56)

tones, she apologizes for the events that have occurred. Yet, her actions are a clear exercise in public manipulation. Her expression of regret serves as a strategic tool to calm the masses and deflect attention from the core issue. By delivering a carefully constructed narrative, she intentionally misleads the public to protect her own interests. The scene exemplifies how power operates through discourse control. By establishing a "regime of truth," she dictates how the public understands the situation.

Figure 5 depicts Dyah Ayu holding a red cloth in front of a restrained zombie, with the police standing behind her. The scene illustrates how power operates through information control. Dyah Ayu spreads propaganda that zombies fear red color, even though they react to strong smell. This false "truth" directs public behavior, creates a sense of control, and keeps people compliant. Fear becomes a political tool, while Dyah Ayu appears as the leader with the solution.



Source: Vidio, 2024

Figure 5 Episode 7 (10:11)

In Episode 8, Dyah Ayu openly presents that public sacrifice is necessary. She tells the crowd, "My beloved people. The time has come. It is difficult, as we must leave our homes. But this is for our happiness. For the future of our children and grandchildren. Together, we'll survive." The applause suggests how controlled discourse can shape social reality and legitimize coercive measures.

Later, Dyah Ayu orders the destruction of bridges, including routes her own group needs, and commands, "blow up every bridge we will cross!" Resistance emerges inside her camp. A follower protests, "We all want to survive here too!" This confrontation reflects Foucault's view that power is unstable and always open to tension and challenge. When supporters see the cost of control, obedience can turn into confrontation. Dyah Ayu's authority fails because it depends on deception and escalating coercion.

After the bridge crumbles and blocks the only exit, central government army arrives and seize Dyah Ayu. But then, her removal does not end the system. The narrative then shifts: Zaenal, long shown as corrupt, receives recognition for "securing" the crisis. This reversal shows how discourse can be rearranged to protect elites. In such a system, legitimacy does not require justice. It requires a story that benefits power.

The ending of the series reinforces a Foucauldian interpretation in which power cannot be reduced to a single individual. Because it circulates through institutions, security apparatuses, and media narratives that reproduce themselves. Although leaders replaced, but the method of power remains. The series suggests that real change demands more than replacing individuals. It demands challenging the mechanisms that manufacture truth, manage fear, and normalize sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

Zona Merah presents the zombie outbreak as a crisis of governance. Emergencies become a struggle over truth, visibility, and public conduct. Local elites compete by controlling media narratives, shifting blame, and justifying security decisions that jeopardize citizens to protect elite continuity. This dynamic appears through Zaenal and Dyah Ayu's dynasty politics, institutional capture, and betrayal.

The series foregrounds biopolitical control by showing how authorities classify the population by deciding who deserves protection and who can be sacrificed during emergencies. Elites weaponize uncertainty and panic to build legitimacy and incrase control. Dyah Ayu's propaganda directs public behavior for her benefits, including the fabrication of "truths" that give people an illusion of control.

Media operates as a regime of truth. Television news frames Maya and her group as the source of the zombies' outbreak, turning citizens into enemies and leaders into saviors. This demonstrates how discourse produces threats, stabilizes authority, and keeps hierarchy intact through stigma, surveillance, and public

fear. At the same time, *Zona Merah* insists that authority remains contested. Maya and Risang embody resistance inside the system, yet the series stresses how difficult resistance becomes when power does not only repress but also produces social reality.

From a Foucauldian view, power does not belong to individuals. It circulates through practices of regulation, surveillance, and truth-production that can be reassembled even when actors change. *Zona Merah* therefore functions as an allegory of crisis politics, where discourse governs life and death and the public bears the costs of emergency rule.

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Ethical clearance: This study did not involve human participants, animal subjects, or sensitive personal data. It was based solely on qualitative textual analysis of the publicly available *Zona Merah* (2024) series on the Vidio streaming platform. All data were drawn from scenes, dialogues, and visual compositions in Season 1. No private or confidential materials were used. Accordingly, formal ethical clearance was not required under institutional research guidelines

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