

GHOSTS POPULARIZED: A TRANSNATIONAL STUDY OF INDONESIAN AND AMERICAN HORROR FILMS

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ABSTRACT

As a type of horror film widely watched by people in both Indonesia and the United States, ghost-themed movies contain a wealth of information that can be gleaned through research. Indonesian culture, which has various ghost myths, makes the discussion on ghosts interesting and useful, particularly if it is also linked to the transnational perspective. This descriptive research focuses on analyzing ghost characters in Indonesian and American horror films to identify portraits associated with ghosts in Indonesian horror films and to examine the changes occurring in American ghost movies from a transnational perspective. The study incorporated Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to interpret ghost characters in Indonesian horror movies selected by using the purposive sampling technique to gather the data based on the specific themes needed in the study. The result showed that ghost portraits in Indonesian horror films could signify anger, vengeance, as well as solitude. Apart from that, by using a transnational perspective to study the phenomena of ghost films in Indonesia and the US, this study found that American ghost movies have developed an American version of ghost characters, and there was a similar pattern – the idea of possession and haunted houses in Indonesian and American ghost films.

Keywords: ghosts, Indonesian horror films, American ghosts movies, transnational

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought many changes in every aspect of human life. The changes also contributed to development in the world of entertainment media,

including the increasing use of technology for the advancement of various popular culture products. Films, for instance, have transformed into a means of entertainment, which has been

supported by advanced technology in terms of visuals, images, and sound effects. To get pleasure, many people search for entertainment by watching films. Films now seem to have become a necessity for people. This can be seen from the fact that many films have been circulating in society. Thus, the development of films as popular culture products is something worth discussing.

Various film genres are available for moviegoers to choose from. Among a few film genres, horror is one of the popular genres that is attractive to audiences (Jung, 2019; Rudy, 2025). Even though not everyone likes horror stuff, this genre is still popular. This type of film is among those that provide a lot of profits to the film industry (Adi, 2011). American horror movies, for example, rank at the top because they can raise the interest of audiences from other countries (Kuniawan, 2023).

However, horror themes that tell stories of ghosts have existed in the development of American literature. Long before American ghost-themed films experienced significant progress, famous American writers Nathaniel Hawthorne in *Young Goodman Brown* (1835) and *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), as well as Edgar Allan Poe in his work *Eleonora* (1842), had included ghosts in their literary works. This point shows that people's passion or enthusiasm for ghost stories continued to develop into the era of cinema with sophisticated audio-visual technology and effects.

In Indonesia, horror films have also become a popular genre among film viewers. The popularity of horror films started in the 1980s with the phenomenal actress, the late Suzzanna, who held the title of the queen of horror movies. Entering the year 2000, the Indonesian horror genre began to develop with comedy scenes inserted as a sub-genre. However, nowadays, Indonesian horror movies are considered to show better quality in all aspects of film.

Many would agree that the feeling of fear when watching horror movies may bring about some good impacts on them. Fear in the form of entertainment has proven to be popular among moviegoers (Scrivner et al., 2023). Fear of scary figures or horrible incidents that give people goose bumps has been essential for filmmakers to entertain the audience. Thus, many people think that sensation can be related to enjoying something horror (Martin, 2019). Regarding this, there have been some studies discussing the impact of watching horror films. Vittrup (2022), for instance, suggested that watching horror movies plays a significant role in strengthening strategies for managing one's fear. Thus, it cannot be denied that horror films are a means of entertainment that provides an opportunity for the audiences to simply fulfil their need for escapism (Kirana, 2012). Besides the escapism fulfilment, audience satisfaction in watching ghost films may also involve several kinds of feelings because, according to Adziz, Hashim & Mustafa (2022), horror

film viewers will be satisfied and happy if they can feel fear or anxiety as well as courage or enthusiasm at the same time.

Horror movies about ghosts still seem to be part of the horror genre that attracts the attention of many viewers. Both Indonesians and Americans use ghosts as typical characters that play a significant role in horror films. Studying the depiction of ghost figures in horror films is necessary because it will provide essential information in identifying ghosts in Indonesian and American horror movies. Thus, this study aims to identify how ghosts are portrayed in Indonesian horror films and to figure out the changes in American ghost movies from a transnational perspective. It is expected that this study can contribute to the development of humanities theory, especially in the study of films, culture, and literature, and assist researchers who study ghost movies.

A discussion about horror movies cannot be separated from scary figures or creatures, as the primary point of attracting the audience's attention. Generally, according to Prohászková (2012), in terms of antagonist characters, horror genre films can be divided into two types of figures: (a) fictional (supernatural) creatures, such as vampires, werewolves, and monsters, and (b) humans, such as psychopathic killers, and serial killers. Even though ghosts are not mentioned in the categorization above, they may be known as supernatural or spiritual beings. The term "ghost" may vary from one

culture to another. As a matter of fact, there is no clearly fixed definition of ghosts because it depends on the person who experiences, observes, and studies ghosts. From the past to the present, people have often talked about ghost stories, spirits, haunted places, etc.

Nowadays, according to Clemen (2004), there are several methods to find ghosts, ranging from complex equipment used by physics researchers to special cameras used by photographers to capture photos of ghosts to obtain more information about the supernatural world. This is done for the purpose of finding out and learning something about ghost phenomena. Psychology, physics, humanities and other scientific disciplines seem to show concern about the ghost phenomenon as a part of human culture that needs to be researched. The discourse about ghosts has also been included by some past literary writers. For instance, Auerbach (2004) discussed ghosts in Victorian literature and explained the difficulty in deciding whether ghosts are a type of monster or an angel. It shows that the phenomenon or existence of ghosts is related to human psychology, beliefs and religions.

However, there are several basic conditions commonly used to describe a ghost in different cultures. In Tibetan-Chinese culture, for instance, ghosts are known as a kind of spirit of a dead person, often with a horribly scary face and appearing to haunt people at night (Huang, 2019). In Thai culture,

ghosts are believed to exist from the past to the present to occupy their space, and they are mostly female spirits regarded as part of the ancestors, told in ancient local folklore (Campoli, 2015). Not much different from Chinese and Thai cultures, ghosts in Indonesian culture are also depicted as spirits or supernatural beings in various scary forms. One of the figures in the form of a spirit that is often mentioned in Indonesian myths is "*kuntilanak*". It is known as the haunting spirit of a woman who died due to murder, suicide or abortion (Luniar & Febriana, 2022).

There is a myth about a female ghost called "*sundel bolong*" that is the spirit of a pregnant woman with a large hole in her back and haunts to take revenge on those who have killed her (Agustiniingsih & Rostiyati, 2019). There is also the myth of a female ghost called "*suster ngesot*" that is circulating among Indonesian people as an urban legend. This female ghost is different from "*kuntilanak*" because it is described as a ghostly figure of a female ghost who cannot stand and walks only by dragging her legs up to her hips (Paranta et al., 2023). Another ghost that is also known as one of the most popular ghosts in Indonesian myths is "*pocong*". It is described as the spirit of a dead person that appears wrapped in a white, usually jumps and disappears (Kurniawan, 2023).

Western culture also recognizes the existence of spirits of dead people, and they are called ghosts. Ghost myths in Western culture are not separated from

Christian influences. The interaction of spiritual beings, such as the spirits of the dead, with humans for bad intentions, is often mentioned in religions and local beliefs (Volkan, 2020). Additionally, several old religious texts have mentioned the phenomena of possession by aggressive spirits, which have been observed through several possession experiences (Keener, 2010). The phenomenon of possession by spirits is also found in other cultures, including Indonesian culture. It is also used as a promising theme in many ghost movies. Stories about ghosts are found in almost all cultures in the world. It is not surprising that horror movies, especially those with a ghost theme, have always been among the most anticipated films. In Indonesian films, for example, ghost themes are shown in cinemas almost every month. It seems to be able to attract the attention of movie lovers (Rudy, 2025). This provides more opportunities for Indonesian horror film producers to be more creative in making more interesting ghost-themed films.

Several previous research in Indonesia and abroad have discussed ghost films; many of those studies mainly discussed horror films in terms of storylines, characters, plot styles, and comparisons with those of a certain period. For instance, Permana (2014) analyzed an Indonesian ghost film *Jelangkung* released in 2001 by focusing on the content of the film, such as the plot techniques, characters and style of narrating, which were considered unique because it had varied screen

or visual effects that were barely used in ghost films in the early 2000s. Other researchers, Meliala & Bezaleel (2016), discussed Indonesian ghost films *Mal Klender* and *Kamar 207* to figure out whether the two movies contained pornographic elements, as in the early 2000s, there were scenes of women dressed in sexy clothes and acting flirtatiously to be included in horror films for the purpose of alleviating fear. There was also another research on the content of ghost movies conducted by Prawiranauli & Wahjudianata, (2018) showing the image of women as brave figures to fight and struggle for family and gender equality in the horror film *Pengabdian Setan*.

Several past studies which discussed about the appearance of ghost figures on films in Indonesian culture such as the research conducted by Agustiningih & Rostiyati (2019) as well as Luniar & Febriana (2022) describing the figure of wicked female ghosts or female spirits of dead women who intend to take the lives of those who have killed them and they are often mentioned in Indonesia ghost mythology. However, transnational studies which discuss in detail the depiction of ghosts in Indonesian horror films and their connection to American horror movies have not been specifically conducted. Therefore, this study was initiated to fill that gap and, at the same time, to provide essential knowledge about ghost films. Apart from that, a research conducted by Prohászková (2012) on horror genres stating about the types of ghost films and

culture including the types, characteristics and development of horror movies; Campoli (2015) with the research concentrating on the image of women as ghosts in Thai movies; Huang (2019) who focused on the Tibetan-Chinese version of ghost traditions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Horror films basically aim to entertain the audience by frightening and shocking them with a storyline which concentrates on humans fighting against terror and disturbance of evil spirits (Oktavianus, 2015; Setyaningsih, 2023).

This study utilized Barthes' semiotic theory to identify ghost portraits in horror films. Barthes' semiotics emphasizes that the signifier and signified work together to create a sign (Griffin, 2012). Thus, this theory is used to figure out the significance behind the ghost figures shown in the horror films. Besides, to link Indonesian ghost films with those in America, this study used the perspective of transnational American studies. Transnational studies in American Studies can be interpreted as a way of studying that extends and involves various countries by linking the analysis of American literary works or cultural phenomena with the effect of globalization in politics and economics (Scheiding, 2019). It can explain the relationship between Indonesian ghost images and the ones from American horror movies.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The data used for the study came from some Indonesian ghost films as well as American ghost movies, by applying the purposive sampling technique. This method allows researchers to collect data samples based on their knowledge, opinion, and judgment regarding the data needed (Obilor, 2023). Therefore, this technique made it easier to gather ghost-themed films, especially those which could be easily accessed or were available in a personal film collection. Data were gathered through four steps: determining the sample criteria, selecting the films by applying purposive sampling technique, observing the films by watching, and note-taking.

Some of Indonesian ghost films used as data in the study were selected based on the themes relevant to images of ghosts characters and horror elements that are significant in the study such as *Pengabdian Setan* (2017), *Jaga Pocong* (2018), *Makmum* (2019), *Lorong* (2019), *Satu Suro* (2019), *Perempuan Tanah Jahanam* (2019), *Lapor Keranda Terbang* (2019), *Danur 3: Sunyaruri* (2019) and some popular American ghost films such as *Drag Me to Hell* (2009), *The Conjuring* (2013), *The Conjuring 2* (2016), *Annabelle: Creation* (2017), *Insidious: The Last Key* (2018), *The Curse of La Llorona* (2019), *The Pope's Exorcist* (2023), and *Evil Dead Rise* (2023).

The data analysis technique employs Barthes' semiotic approach to reveal the meanings embedded in the visual and narrative signs of

horror films. The process involves identifying signs and interpreting the meaning that reflect the themes of ghosts images and the portrayals of horror elements in the films.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

The data analysis presents two key findings for discussion. First, the analysis indicates that ghosts depicted in horror films are typically characterized as angry and vengeful entities, often associated with themes of solitude. Second, from a transnational perspective, various horror elements from cultures outside the United States have been incorporated into American horror films, particularly concerning the portrayal of ghost figures.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Portraits of Ghosts in Horror Films

Although not many academicians view supernatural narratives or topics as serious studies, these themes remain essential in today's popular culture (Goldstein et al., 2007; Huang, 2019). One of the points which can be discussed is the ghost portraits shown in ghost-themed films. The results of observation by watching several Indonesian and American ghost movies showed that ghosts were portrayed in some kinds of versions. However, from those various kinds of versions, there were three types of ghost images often portrayed in ghost films:

a. Anger and Vengefulness

Ghost characters in Indonesian horror movies such as the ghost of

Mawarni Suwono in *Pengabdian Setan* (2017) the spirit of Sulastri in *Jaga Pocong* (2018), the ghost of Lastri in *Satu Suro* (2019), the wicked ghost of Kartika in *Danur 3: Sunyaruri* (2019) are often identical to the image of an angry and vengeful figure. Their anger is shown towards humans, and there is often a desire for revenge. Anger is basically a feeling experienced by humans. However, in horror films, ghost characters are depicted as if they have the same feelings of anger as humans. So, the concepts of anger and vengefulness are essential to discuss, even though there can be various meanings of anger and vengefulness. Various kinds of conditions or events cause someone to be angry, and usually, there is no limit or measurement for it. This means, each individual may have different reactions and sensitivity regarding the cause of anger. Anger has been discussed in a number of studies. It is categorized as a negative and subjective emotional expression that an individual shows because of experiencing an unpleasant event (Novaco, 2016). Some studies on psychology and behavior also confirmed that since anger tends to be negative, it will result in negative behavior, for example, acting aggressively or attacking, which can lead to danger (van Doorn et al., 2014).

It has been said that there is also research in psychology that discusses the feelings of ghosts, and even though it seems difficult to believe and to do. Regarding this, Barret & Barret (2016), who once

wrote about ghosts' feelings, said that there are many mysteries which cannot be explored about ghosts' emotions. However, people have indeed been studying it. Additionally, Potegal & Novaco (2010), in their research, for instance, revealed that anger has been talked about since human civilization and especially in cultural history, anger has been associated with supernatural beings such as ghosts, demons, or gods. which most people in ancient times believed. Many ancient texts or literature also mentioned people's fear of angry supernatural beings because it could cause disasters or bad fortune. This basic concept seems to be frequently adopted by many people to portray ghosts.

Uncontrolled anger often results in the emergence of several feelings. One of the impacts of anger is vengefulness or revenge (Cherry, 2023). So, anger attached to the characteristics of ghosts in Indonesian horror films is associated with feelings of revenge. The female ghost characters, such as "*kuntilanak*", "*sundel bolong*" or any kind of female wandering spirits, have long been portrayed as antagonistic characters who returned to the human world to take revenge because of their anger toward people who had injured, killed or harmed them during their lifetime. This pattern of depicting ghost characters has become a cinematic tradition in the horror genre. The character of female ghosts in Indonesian horror movies of the 70s, 80s and 90s, played by the late legendary actress Suzzanna

in *Beranak dalam Kubur* (1971), *Sundel Bolong* (1981), *Telaga Angker* (1984), *Malam Jumat Kliwon* (1986), *Malam Satu Suro* (1988), and *Perjanjian di Malam Keramat* (1991), was often depicted as vengeful female ghosts coming to haunt and to punish people who caused her to die.

b. Solitude

Being portrayed as figures that are always in dark, silent, and unknown places, ghosts in horror films are often associated with loneliness or solitude. The image of ghosts as lonely figures shown in movies can be seen through the settings or conditions created in horror films such as *Pengabdian Setan*, *Danur 3: Sunyaruri*, *The Conjuring*, and *The Curse of La Llorona*. For example, abandoned old houses, uninhabited flats, remote villages or islands are used as shooting locations for Indonesian horror films to depict a quiet atmosphere. Regarding the portrait of solitude, some perceptions can be revealed. Loneliness or solitude, according to McGraw (1995), is the absence of the presence of desired people, and it is considered a negative feeling because it is the opposite of happiness and may lead to suffering, which can endanger a person's health.

There are several conditions experienced by people who feel lonely, such as feeling strange, rejected, loss of self-confidence, boredom, anger, as well as feelings of depression (Perlman & Peplau, 1998). The feelings related to loneliness can be perceived as a

condition that is far from stability and peace, which is not a condition desired by anyone in this world. Ghosts are portrayed as lonely creatures that live in darkness. Such an image shows how human beings depict ghosts. Ghosts are always associated with unhappy conditions. This can be simply interpreted as the world of ghosts is identical with bad conditions, while the world of humans, conversely, is a better place.

In fact, what happens is that people do not know much about the world of ghosts because, scientifically, it is probably only connected to imagination, fiction, or perceptions that arise in someone's mind. This has led Bissell (2017) to suggest that things related to ghosts cannot be fully understood. Therefore, ghost phenomena in the academic field always belong to psychology. It is acceptable when people describe ghosts in such depictions, mostly influenced by beliefs and religions which have been passed down from generation to generation.

From the two portraits of ghosts reflected in horror films, there is something related to human life that can be observed. Regarding this, Ironside (2018) agreed that many people believe that there is a moral message or knowledge in every ghost story that people can learn. The images of ghosts showing anger or vengefulness, as well as loneliness, portrayed through Indonesian horror films, are associated with unpleasant images. This seems to be in accordance with the idea of Huang (2019) that

depictions of ghosts are almost always negative, bad, gloomy and dangerous. This means such images always come to most people's minds when they talk about ghosts.

The negative image of ghosts in Indonesian horror movies can symbolize negative traits, bad thoughts or evil, which are the opposite of compassion. Therefore, many Indonesian ghost films often present religious characters such as pious men who diligently pray, priests, or spiritual teachers (*"ustadz"* in Islam) as a sign of kindness and carry a positive image to put an end to evil. This pattern of ghost movies shows the role of good qualities in fighting evil in humans. Such a concept is a basic understanding in Indonesian culture, which always upholds religious teachings (beliefs in God the creator) as noble values, since they, according to Lakonawa (2013), aim to encourage humans to be kind. It is perceived as the main foundation of Indonesian culture. This concept of belief in almighty God even became the basis for Indonesians, which is used as a guide to life, particularly in a society where the crime rate is increasing.

4.2.2 The concept of American Ghost-Themed Films from a Transnational Point of View

a. American Version of Ghost Characters

Analysis from the transnational perspective shows that the spread of culture, including ghost movie patterns from various countries, has a significant influence on the formation of ghost characters in American horror films. In the

present time, many people are familiar with the culture of various countries, including the myths, urban legends and beliefs. This would be interesting material to use as a theme for horror movies, particularly ghost films. Ghost-themed films from various countries. This means cultural ideas, including traditions and cultural narratives, have travelled across national borders. This condition is in line with Szulc's idea (2022) that it is the effect of cultural mobility, which shows that nowadays culture tends to be increasingly transnational. Asian ghost films, for example, have been widely watched by people in the US and recreated by American film producers since the 2000s. Some ghost-themed movies from Southeast Asia show the unique life in terms of culture and its elements. They have been shown in the US so that Southeast Asians who live in the US can reminisce about their own culture, and for American people who watch ghost movies from Southeast Asia can attract an audience by recreating those films into American versions.

Lauser (2016) stated that Southeast Asian horror films, which are influenced by religions, often focus on interactions with spirits, cultural traditions, belief in the afterlife, karma, values of good and bad, etc. In fact, this kind of concept does not only exist in Asian ghost-themed movies, but it is also found in many American horror movies. Beliefs in ghosts and mystical worlds are basically inseparable from human culture. As a result, people

usually seek answers or solutions to these supernatural events through religious rituals, and they are also portrayed in films. Therefore, ghosts are depicted as scary and are portrayed as figures or characters to come and haunt in films. Those ghosts may be found in urban legends, myths, or local beliefs and commonly appear as spirits or ghosts of people who died with a feeling of revenge; those who were murdered, those who followed the devil cults, and those who practice black magic.

In the late 90s and early 2000s, ghost films from Asian countries gained great popularity. One of the scary horror films from Japan, entitled *Ringu* (1998) at that time was probably the most well-known ghost film. Based on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) website managed by Amazon, one of the most reputable US companies, there have been several American ghost films adapted from Asian horror movies. One of them was *Ringu*, which was remade by American film producers with the title *The Ring* in 2002. Other Japanese ghost-themed movies were remade into American versions with the same titles, such as *Grudge* (2004), *Dark Water* (2005), *Pulse* (2006), and *One Missed Call* (2008). Next, a collaborative horror film between Hong Kong and Singapore, entitled *The Eye* (2002), which became a popular ghost film in Chinese communities, especially in Southeast Asian countries, was also remade by Hollywood film producers with the same title in 2008 and placed the famous actress

Jessica Alba as the main character for the film. Likewise, the Thai ghost film *Shutter* (2004) was made into an American version in 2008.

Some of the popular ghost characters from Asian movies, such as the wicked female ghost Sadako in *Ringu*, ghost mother and child Kayako and Toshio in *Ju-On: The Grudge*, female ghost Mitsuko in *Dark Water*, female ghost Kuchisake-Onna in *Carved: The Slit-Mouthed Woman* and female ghost Natre in *Shutter*. Meanwhile, ghost characters, such as female ghosts Kuntilanak, Sundal Bolong, and Pocong, have appeared in Indonesian horror films since 1980. However, it is different from typical American ghost movies. In the past, ghosts in American movies were created as disembodied entities that did not appear as actual ghost characters. In other words, ghost or evil spirit characters in American films were not as popular as those from Asia because they were not clearly defined as characters. According to Lilek (2020), at first, the obviously popular characters in Hollywood horror films tended to be werewolves, vampires or zombies, and then they came up with some scary ideas, such as evil spirits possessing human bodies or evil forces entering the house. So, they were pictured merely as an entity that can possess or disturb humans. The form of the ghost character was not the priority.

Later, the form of the ghost character in American horror films became clearer and started showing characteristics of American ghost

characters. Now, Hollywood has popularized its version of the ghost character. Currently, the ghost characters in American horror films are clearly visible. For instance, in the film *Insidious*, there is The Bride in Black, who is the evil spirit of a serial killer, often appearing in a black wedding dress. In the same film, there is also a red-faced demon. In *Conjuring*, there is also a famous ghost character in the form of a scary demon dressed as a nun, named Valak. It is also popularized again in *The Nun* and has become a popular icon in horror films.



Figure 1. Three film ghost characters popularized by Hollywood –Valak

The increasing flow of immigration from Mexico to the US, for example, has brought changes to American culture, including ghost myths. Many Mexicans brought their beliefs and legends when they migrated to the US. The myth of a female ghost, *La Llorona*, for

instance, who is depicted as an angry ghost, spread throughout the whole US and became popular when it was turned into a horror film, *The Curse of La Llorona*, in 2019. Not only that, the Mexican culture known as “*El Dia de Muertos*” or The Day of the Dead has also been celebrated in several states in the US. Due to the popularity of “*El Dia de Muertos*” culture in American society, Disney film production also used the theme for their animated movie entitled *Coco* in 2017. It shows that the coming of immigration with Hispanic cultural backgrounds has contributed to the enrichment of American culture. It also reveals that the American people were able to adapt and participate in celebrating the Day of the Dead.

This situation seems to be in line with the phenomenon described by Jin & Yi (2020) regarding the condition of the US, which tends to be transnational by underlining that the culture, products and economy of a country have spread beyond its borders. The adoption of other cultures found in the US society can be traced to the arrival of migrants with diverse cultural backgrounds from various countries, and they create emotional, political and social bonds with the new regions or countries they live in, the US. This condition also creates an opportunity for the US to take appropriate steps to fulfil the hope of immigrants to feel their culture and to strengthen the identity of the American nation.

The fact that ghost films from other cultures or countries are adapted into American versions can reflect that there are elements of other cultures, such as myths, legends, and beliefs, that can be used by American film producers for certain purposes, such as commodities and constructing identity. Febrina (2017) stated that American horror movie makers were interested in adopting elements of Eastern culture in their films to emphasize the importance of Hollywood's position as a global market and the aim of satisfying the desires of audiences from various countries. Because culture tends to be transnational, elements within ghost-themed films increasingly show similarities and mutual enrichment in terms of creativity in producing more unique and box-office films. Thus, the transnational perspective that frames this discussion reflects that there has been cultural influence from other countries (which was brought by immigrants and supported by technological development) to a certain country, for example, the US. This opportunity is used by many American film producers to fulfil the expectations of the entire community in the US and at the same time, construct an ideology emphasizing American identity and the importance of American values.

b. Elements of Horror in American Ghost Films

After observing and analyzing the characteristics of Indonesian and American ghost films as a result of transnationalism, the study showed

that there were two patterns that appear most frequently in both Indonesian and American ghost movies: the phenomenon of possession and haunted houses. These two patterns have become popularly used in many American ghost movies as an element that is considered effective in arousing fear among the audience. Spirit (also commonly identical with ghost) possession is not a new phenomenon in everyday life. In Indonesia, this condition often occurs in society. Many people associate it with the existence of evil spirits or ghosts that feel disturbed and possess the human body to take revenge or convey messages.

Possession, which is also known as a trance phenomenon, is also found in Western culture. Religious perspectives are often used as a source to explain the phenomenon of possession. Based on the Catholic Church tradition and Christian scriptures, demons and spirits of dead people can possess a human's body and control it (Widiyanto, 2018). Meanwhile, in the Buddhist view, the existence of beings who inhabit the ghost realm is mentioned in Buddhist scriptures, and for that reason, Pandoan (2015) said that spirit possession can occur, and Buddhist monks also perform rituals or prayers to tell the disturbing spirits to leave. Apart from that, Islamic teachings also state that the phenomenon of demonic or satanic possession can happen in people with weak faith, evil intentions and without worship (Pasmawati, 2018). So, the idea of

possession is not easy to explain because it depends on the frame used to define it. In addition, according to Cohen (2008), despite the difficulty of explaining the phenomenon of possession, many studies interpret that possession involves a series of complex patterns of behavior and thoughts of a person, such as a belief among the Jews about two types of possessions- spirits communicating through an intermediary body and spirits possessing to make someone sick and disabled. The patterns and concepts of spirit possession (trance) as explained above seem to be often found both in myths and in ghost films. Religious perspectives are often used as a source to explain the phenomenon of possession.

Pros and cons regarding the phenomenon of possession exist based on the view that someone uses to define possession. From the psychiatric perspective, possession can be connected to a type of mental disorder caused by trauma, abuse and patterns of parenting. Despite the various perceptions on possession, it remains an essential element in American ghost movies to attract audience, for example, *Exorcist: The Beginning* (2004), *The Devil Inside* (2012), *The Possession* (2013), *Evil Dead* (2013), *The Conjuring* (2013), *Annabelle: Creation* (2017), *The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It* (2021), *The Pope's Exorcist* (2023) and *Evil Dead Rise* (2023). Perhaps in the future, the theme of possession will continue to appear in horror films.

The second pattern frequently found in Indonesian and American ghost films is the presence of haunted buildings or houses. Haunted houses are popular settings and considered an essential element of horror in ghost-themed movies. Haunted buildings as a setting have long been used in literature, such as palaces, monasteries, old houses, etc. According to Yusof et al. (2017), it is found in European and Western Gothic literature around the 18th century. Literature of films which narrate about haunted houses reveals the same basic formula, for example, a mysterious evil force from outside causing chaos, terror, and fear for the family living in the house (Paquet-Deyris, 2012). Additionally, Puglise (2020) in her study stated that haunted houses portrayed in stories or literary works may also be houses inhabited by ghosts, spirits or residual energy from the previous occupants with evil intentions.

5. CONCLUSION

The result of this research contains several essential points on ghost-themed films. First, data analysis also reveals that ghost images frequently portrayed in horror films tend to be negative, for instance, anger and loneliness. These two portraits were always found in all ghost films, which were also the primary data. Second, the portrait of anger attached to ghost characters in many Indonesians as well as American horror movies often leads to a desire for revenge against those who cause their death.

Apart from that, the ghost character also indicates loneliness.

The image of solitude also seems to be a fundamental portrait of the ghost character in the film because the characters are depicted in the dark, quiet, sad and gloomy settings, conditions and atmosphere. This is because most cultures in the world associate ghosts with lonely figures who have not had any time to accomplish their tasks or fulfil their expectations while they are still alive. Third, ghost characters in Asian movies, especially Indonesian horror films, often take the form of ghosts or evil spirits as significant characters, whereas this was rarely found in American ghost films.

However, the impact of transnationalism is that Hollywood has created scary figures as ghost characters, and they have become popular. Finally, the impact of transnationalism that can be seen in the films is the emergence of several kinds of changes in storylines and character figures because of the spread of Asian horror films, which often portray ghosts as their typical characters. American ghost-themed films in the current era, for example, have also shown ghost characters whose forms appear clearer than the ghost films in the past, which were less obvious in depicting ghost figures. In this way, people will recognize these figures as typical American ghost characters. The increasingly transnational situation can reflect that there are more aspects in human life, especially those related to popular culture, that would lead to similarities.

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