



## MONSTROUS-FEMALE OF THREE SOUTHEAST ASIAN HORROR MOVIES

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### ABSTRACT

This article studies the dynamic changes of two beautiful women into fearful, monstrous females experienced by characters in Indonesian ghost movies such as *Sundelbolong*, *Setan Sumiati*, *Kuntilanak*, *Suster Ngesot* from Indonesia. This study argues that the changes into ghost pictures represent the reorientation of the earth into a dreadful, hostile nature. The balance of the condition of the narrative describes the harmonic union of the feminine and the masculine in marriage; the break and the loss of equilibrium indicate the grief, rape, and robbery caused by the separation of the feminine from the masculine and the presence of other masculine invaders. The rape and robbery symbolize the invasion and exploitation, and the rage of ghosts signifies the rage of the earth to the invasion and exploitation of unattended land, nature. Yet, they have different structures when narrating the goal of the ghost returning to the world and being forced back to the underworld. These similar structures are influenced by the cultural and political history of the society in which the story belongs. It also unveils how they (the land) deal with colonialization and exploitation.

**Keywords:** Asian horror films Comparative literature, monstrous female

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi perempuan cantik menjadi sosok perempuan monstus dalam film-film hantu Indonesia seperti *Sundel Bolong*, *Setan Sumiati*, *Kuntilanak*, dan *Suster Ngesot*. Transformasi tersebut dipahami sebagai representasi perubahan bumi dari ruang yang harmonis menjadi alam yang menakutkan dan bermusuhan. Keseimbangan naratif merepresentasikan kesatuan harmonis antara unsur feminin dan maskulin dalam pernikahan, sementara keretakan relasi tersebut menandai trauma berupa pemerkosaan dan perampasan akibat pemisahan feminin dari maskulin serta hadirnya maskulinitas invasif. Tindakan pemerkosaan dan perampasan dimaknai sebagai simbol invasi dan eksploitasi, sedangkan kemarahan hantu merepresentasikan perlawanan bumi terhadap kolonialisasi dan eksploitasi atas tanah dan alam yang terabaikan. Meskipun memiliki pola naratif yang serupa, film-film tersebut menunjukkan perbedaan struktur dalam menggambarkan tujuan kembalinya hantu ke dunia dan proses pengusiran mereka ke alam bawah. Perbedaan ini dipengaruhi oleh konteks sejarah budaya dan politik masyarakat yang melatarbelakanginya, serta mengungkap cara alam merespons kolonialisme dan eksploitasi.

**Kata kunci:** Perbandingan sastra, film horror Asia, perempuan monstus

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## INTRODUCTION

In many literary works, women have always been associated with nature. Women and nature are depicted as life-givers, nurturers, and guardians. In the classical narrative, nature is a woman who has a feminine name such as Gaia, Bhumi, or Pertiwi. Their images symbolize a holy, powerful woman (Thurer 1995). Yet, women and nature are also depicted as destroyers and killers. They cause fear and rage as hurricanes destroy life. The order of nature to obey or destroy humans because the woman is nature and nature is a woman.

Furthermore, many female characters in the narrative were once nurtured and guardians, yet turned into destroyers. Kuntilanak and Sundel Bolong in Indonesia, Pontianak in Malay and Singapore, and Nang Nak in Thailand are names that remain in the collective memory of their society. These female figures are imagined as extremely beautiful, attractive women who turn into sinister, frightening ghosts after their tragic death. People believe that they sometimes appear in desolate locations as beautiful women seducing wanton men, then turn into scary horror creatures.

The existence of female ghosts in the narratives has attracted many studies worldwide. There have been many studies on the topic of monstrous feminine or monstrous females linked to women's psychoanalysis and national development, such as a study by Creed (1993), Ussher (2006), Giorgio (1994), Duile (2020), and Tan (2010). These studies show that the reproduction of ghost stories in film elaborates the problems, dilemmas, and anxieties of a materially successful nation entering a higher stage of advanced global capitalism and patriarchal discipline. This patriarchal discipline can be identified by the legitimacy of religion in the Kuntilanak movie in Indonesia (Duile 2020, 299). So far, in Southeast Asia, there are many interpretations of the appearance of these female ghost characters, which are the focus of this study. Because the woman is the main character in the narrative of female ghosts, many studies approach this narrative by using a feminist perspective to understand the existence of the female ghost. Much research found the tone of resistance in the female ghost by showing that the female ghost represents a powerful feminist figure who can destroy not only patriarchal space, but also colonial space (Lai 2014). Such representation of the underworld women may empower women compared to that of weak women (Lee and Mahyuddin 2015). The liberation and powerfulness can be seen in her laugh that the female ghost's unbridled laughter unleashes the power of the female voice to pierce the patriarchal edifice to undermine the threat of male dominance, all a woman needs to do is laugh with abandon (Izharuddin 2020). As a result, the filmmaker is praised for picturing the powerful women figure (Aziz 2020). In contrast to this notion of a monstrous feminine as a powerful figure, Mohd. Zulkifli et al. (2012) found throughout their field study in Malaysia that the film fails to educate society. Similarly, Bravianingrum (2011) found that monstrous femininity has negative attributes in Indonesia in her comparative study on society's perception toward the female ghost in Japanese *Ko-Sodate Yuurei*, which has a positive perception from the Japanese, while *Kuntilanak* has a negative perception from Indonesian.

Despite the previous studies dealing with female ghosts in Southeast Asia, to the best of our knowledge, none has been done by putting the transformation process from a beautiful woman into a frightening female ghost as the primary focus. This article argues that the reverse of beauty to ugliness is more than just the phenomenon of gender empowerment. Nevertheless, it is more tied to the traditional spiritual view in the respective area. Moreover, Southeast Asia is attached to the spiritualism of Buddhism in Thailand and Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia. The Sufism of Islam and Buddhism places women in the most honorable place. In Buddhism, the earth is depicted as a woman known as Goddess Prati and Goddess Bhumi. Both pose women as nature that posture the source of birth and life, and the survival of life on earth depends heavily on women. In Islam, a woman is a symbol of compassion, and this symbol is marked by the ownership of the womb inside the body of a woman. The womb is the sacred place where honor and dignity reside. Therefore, the analysis of the structure of the stories may shed light to understand the hidden meaning of this dramatic reversal. By applying the structural analysis developed by Tzvetan Todorov, this article unveils the meanings of the stories' structure through the three objective narratives. At the end of the paper, the concept of ecofeminism helps to explain the meaning of this reversal of existence in the story.

## METHODS

In order to investigate the structure of the narration, we analyze the story using Tzvetan Todorov's structural analysis of narrative. The structural narrative focuses on the narrative part of speech, the clause, and the organization of the clause to explain the balance, imbalance, and reestablishment of the balance that occur in a society in which the female character experiences a dramatic reversal (Tzvetan and Arnold 2012; Tzvetan Todorov 1971). The examination of the structural analysis focuses on the schematic representation of several explanations. The first to identify is a clause that consists of an agent, a predicate, and an adjective. The agent is the character, the predicate is an action which can be a positive or a negative character, and the adjective is the quality of the clause. The modality is about what will happen next. After that, the arrangement between clauses is examined based on their syntagmatic sequence. This sequence is perceived as a finished story, which unveils the completion of the story. The relationship between clauses examines the balance or the imbalance of the social relations between men and women, human and non-human. These relations are arranged in a syntagmatic pattern that sequences the story. From the sequence, the reader understands the story. The examination of this relation is read based on ecofeminist criticism.

The narrative analysis method is used to comparatively read the narrative of three films from different countries in Southeast Asia, namely the story of the movie *Sundel Bolong* (1981), which is abbreviated to SB, from Indonesia; *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* or PHSM film (2004), and *Nang Nak* or NN film (1999). All the movies are derived from folktales, which have become the collective memory of societies in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. The result of this structural comparative analysis is read through the paradigm of ecofeminism.

Ecofeminism was first introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne, and it derives from various social movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It became popular in the context of protests and activities against environmental destruction. Ecofeminist believes that modern science generated women's oppression. The modern science is a failure methodologically and is grounded and linked to the material relations of patriarchal violence, capitalism, and colonialism. They see that scientific rationality is the core driving the Western people to colonize and cause third-world poverty (Mies and Shiva 2014, 14). Modern science underpins the development of capitalism that creates violence against women in the ways that it drags women to work labour as to have a paid job, especially in third-world countries. As a result, modern science has left the children motherless, and the earth is exploited by greedy masculine capitalism (Molyneux and Steinberg 1995, 89).

## FINDING

The story is understood through the syntagmatic sequence of the clauses structured in the story. The theory of narrative structure was proposed by Tzvetan Todorov (1971; 2012), who introduced the organization of clause sequence. This theory helps to explain the sequences transforming beautiful women into monstrous femininity. By comparing the sequences of three objected studies, the structural narrative analysis unveils the similarities and differences among objected studies. This article compares three ghost stories *Sundel bolong* (SB) (1981, Indonesia), *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* (PHSM) (2004, Malaysia), and *Nang Nak* (NN) (1999, Thailand). These ghost stories reside as collective memories of their own societies and have been transformed into many different media. Based on Todorov's theory, the sequence of the storyline is divided into the organization as follows:

### The Situation of Equilibrium, Namely, Male and Female Unification Through Sacred Marriage

The situation of equilibrium in the three stories is as follows:

Table 1. The Situation of Equilibrium in the Films

No	SB	PHSM	NN
1		Physically beautiful and fragrant dancer	
2		Many men attract to Maryam's beauty and her mysterious fragrance.	
3	A masculine rich stable loving man attracts and married Alishah	The Marriage of Maryam to Danial	Mak married Nak and they live happily

The agents of the three films are three female ghosts who were at first depicted as attractive women. They are Maryam in *Pontianak*, Nak in *Nang Nak*, and Alisha in *Sundel Bolong*. They are shown to have a beautiful face, a fragrant body, and artistic skill. In Todorov's terms, this attractiveness is the adjective of the agents, part of narrative speech, which corresponds to the quality of the three female characters. Their attractiveness allows them to become the centre of attraction, and thus the centre of the predicate, which denotes action and modifies the preceding situation. This predicate can be seen in the event that a male character is interested and then falls in love with a female character. This is followed by the union in marriage between the female and male characters because of love. The predicate of marriage in the stories is translated as the unity of masculine and feminine. This unity is categorized as the situation of equilibrium based on Murata's (1992, 169) view, an ecofeminist.

### The Breakdown of the Situation

The breakdown of the situation in the three films can be identified in the separation of masculine and feminine. This separation is a clause caused by several predicates, modalities, and adjectives of the narrative part of speech, as shown in the table below:

Table 2. The Breakdown Situation in the Films

No	SB	PHSM	NN
1	Hendarto departs to his duty.	Danial leaves Maryam for trade traveling.	Mak departs to the battle field.
2	Alisha vows	Miriam is pregnant	Nak is pregnant
3	Alishah is sad, despairs for the parting	Miriam is sad	Mak is sad
4	Alisha is seduced by other men	Miriam was sad and fill his heart with the love to the musical instrument	Nak asks his husband news in war from Biksu
5	Alisha was raped	Mirsani offers a companion and tries to rape	Deliver a baby
6	Alisha is pregnant and feels guilty for breaking his vow	Miriam was robbed and deliver her baby then dies	Nak dies

The table shows that the union by marriage is followed by the separation. This separation is signified by the action of the departure of the husbands' departure. Hendarto is assigned to sail, Danial goes on his trade trip, and Mak departs for the battlefield. The departure of the husbands causes sadness for the women. Because of loving their husband so much, the wives vow to keep their love faithfully. The vow is a modality, an action that has not yet taken place but which is

nonetheless present in the imagination. This can be seen in the conversation between Alisha and Hendarto in the film *Sundelbolong*, quoted below:

"Alisha:

In my life, there are only three things that sadden me. First, the death of my parents. Second, the death of my beloved twin. Third, our parting"

[...]

I vow to always be waiting for you. I will never stain our love. You are my savior, my love."

This conversation shows Alisha's great despair on account of her parting with Hendarto. This led him to vow to protect herself. Similar despair was also shown by Miriam in PHDM and Nak in NN. Miriam senses bad things and promises to be a guardian, meanwhile, Nak promises to wait Mak going home. They naturally act as guardians in the way they are protecting the husband's wealth, including protecting themselves. Alisha did the tailoring. Tailoring means production, which is the opposite of spending. This action can be seen as protecting the husband's wealth. Similar to Miriam, during her husband's absence, she protected her husband's land and gold. So does Nak; she cultivated her rice paddies and visited monks to ease her heart. They are products and protect.

However, these women are fragile guardians when they are sensitive because of pregnancy or loneliness. Here, the perception of the people toward the lonesome women allows the failed men to approach them with love in the past, sense their fragility, and see it as an opportunity to dominate them. This belief is a point of view that affects the relations between men and women. As a result of this belief, Mirsani deceitfully robbed pregnant Miriam and seduced her. Rudi and his friend rapped Alisha and forced her to be back working as a sex worker. Nak was insulted because of wandered to gather news about her lost husband in the war. Here, the perception and belief toward the lone women as weak and fragile, open a change for men to enthusiastically offer them to be a protector. Yet, when they are objected, they are cruelly and savagely robbed and rapped until the female character dies. Robbed, rapped, and dead signify the failure of the guardian to protect the wealth and the vow. In addition, the other male forcedly accesses to their sexual organ is considered as humiliation. In Malay tradition, sex is considered as spatial shame and honor. It defines women's dignity as it is shown below in the conversation between Marsani and Miriam: he visited her after previously applying some kind of oil that gave him the power to make women unconsciously madly in love.

Marsani:

Miryam...

To fill the void that is caused by the departure of Danial.. allow me..

Miriam:

Dahh, you are not respecting me and Danial

Miriam:

(realizes the oil on Marsani's hand when she caught his hand that is about to touch her) What is this? Don't think that this oil will make you virile

Marsani:

I will give you everything [...]

The deaths of the female characters of the three films place a woman's dignity as something that has to be respected. Alisha, Meriam, and Nak remained faithful despite the circumstances they faced.

### The Loss of Equilibrium

As the balance of equilibrium is signified by marriage, and the breakdown of equilibrium is by separation, the loss of the equilibrium can be the return of the dead female characters and their transformation from beautiful, charming women into the sinister, horrible ghosts. The relations among clauses show the cause and the effect of the predicate conducted by the agent, as well as their modalities and adjectives.

Table 3. The Loss of Equilibrium in the Films

NO	SB	PHSM	NN
1	Alisha died when trying to abort her baby	Miriam was killed accidentally when she protected herself from being raped, and when she was forced to deliver her babies.	Nak died when delivering her baby
2	Alisha's soul returns to the world in the form of a ghost to live with her beloved husband and to revenge	Miriam's soul returns to the world as in the body of Mariam from Medan who sometimes transforms into a horrible ghost insisting Marsani to return his heirloom.	Nak returns to the world to own her husband and to live a happy life as she dreamt.
3	Alisha killed her rapist	Miriam terrorizes her killer both in reality and in the dream of the killer.	Nak kills those who try to unveil her identity.

The loss of equilibrium is derived from the cruelty of masculine agents to the feminine guardian. One of the natures of the feminine is a protector, such as a mother who protects their child. The loyal and faithful women fight to keep their vow, yet their physical nature is unable to beat the strong, powerful, brutal, lustful men. The encounter of these adjectives, such as faithful, weak, soft, brutal, lust, and cruel, imposes the loss of equilibrium in the narration. It inflicts destruction on society because female characters should be dead and transform into ghosts to balance the cruelty of men. As seen in the movie SB and PHSM, Alisha and Miriam transform into ghosts called Sundel Bolong and Pontianak to take revenge on the intruder. Ghostly form empowered them and gave them endurable supernatural power. Miriam returns to take revenge on Marsani and his escorts and forces him to return her belongings.

This form also permits them to be with their lover, as seen in the film SB and NN. As the table shows, three female characters are still attached to their lovers and duties. Miriam's duty is to protect her wealth; meanwhile, Alisha and Nak love their husband so much. Yet they protect

their identity to stay with their husband. Alisha acts as Shinta to convince Hendarto that she is not Alisha's ghost. Nak kills people who try to unveil her death.

### The Successful Search

The loss of balance leads the story to search for a way to restore the balance of life on the earth. As seen in the three movies, as male agents' sincere love for their wives, they trusted them and were never aware of any mysterious events surrounding them. Even though their close friend and society warn them, they keep ignoring. In the film SB and NN, Hendarto was content with the presence of Shinta, Alisha's disguised as her twin sister, and Mak enjoys the tranquillity of family life as he dreamt while he was away on the battlefield. Unlike SB and NN, in the movie PHSM, Miriam did not return to her lover, but returned for revenge and embodied herself in another character's body.

Table 4. The Successful Search by the Female's Characters in the Films

NO	SB	PHSM	NN
1	Her identity is unveiled by the husband and her enemy	Her identity is unveiled by the enemy	Her identity is unveiled by the enemy and husband
2	Husband asks for help from a religious leader	Marsani try to fight Maria	Husband asks religious leader for help
3	Other parties look for a shaman to overcome the ghost because the ghost is powerful.		The ghost is powerful that a group of people cannot overcome her rage.
4	The religious leader appears to explain the why	Marsani died	Religious leaders unite to return the soul

However, after several horror mysterious incidents, and people cannot stand for the disaster caused by the ghost, some clauses allow the male character to suspect and question the identity of the ghost. For example, Mak suddenly looks down to the earth and sees between his feet as suggested by the monk, and sees the reality of the environment where he lives. Hendarto picks Sinta's handbag and found their wedding picture. This moment allows them to seek religious leader help, who can explain the reason of the returning of the dead person who is the turning into the ghost.

Yet, such a relation leads to destruction. Mak's rationality is questioned. His rationality is lost, which means the loss of his balance. For humans, the existence of mind, body, and soul is considered to balance human life. As a result, the monk visited him and gave him advice. Similarly, when Hendarto realized that Shinta was Alisha, he asked for the help of a religious leader. The destruction can also be seen in the relationship between Marsani and Mariam. Marsani, who was consciously aware of the return of Maryam, felt terrorized and depressed. Unlike the two movies, the Malaysian did not involve the religious leader to demolish the female ghost, yet Marsani led himself to fulfill Maryam's wish and paid for his mistakes.



The destruction of ghost-human relations due to ghosts and human beings having different points of view and beliefs, which led them to act differently. As shown in the movies, SB, who returns as this ghost, not only changes their look but also changes their behaviour. They become frightening, deluding, cruel, sadistic, and deceptive. This is done because they can only survive in the world by tricking, lying, or killing. Their presence in the world cannot balance the life of the masculine. The connection of masculine to masculine results in the loss of equilibrium, which means destruction.

### Re-establishment of the Initial Equilibrium

Religious leaders take a significant role in re-establishing the initial equilibrium in the two films, SB and NN. The religious ritual is absent in the combat with Mirim and Marsani, but he asks for forgiveness and promises to return the wealth, the house, the land, and the gold that he took from Miriam deceitfully during the absence of Danial. After returning her wealth, Marsani died, and his generations, newborns, the daughter of Ana, Marsani's daughter, were celebrated. However, a small sword is still not returned yet, and Norman, his son-in-law, is haunted.

Only a religious leader can perform the prayer and know the way to return the soul to their spiritual realm. The table below shows:

Table 4. The Successful Search by the Female's Characters in the Films

No	SB	PHSM	NN
1	The religious leader recites the holy script	A newborn is celebrated.	The head of Biksu chants
2	The husband asks the ghost to go	Miriam haunts Norm	The husband asks the ghost to go
			The biksu makes a hole in the head and take the soul with him

The films end in a similar way in terms of the presence of a spiritual figure, except for the Malaysian film. Both Indonesian and Thailand films show the act of stabbing a nail or a peg into the head or other body parts of the ghost. By feminists, this is seen as a form of sexual oppression and is understood as a patriarchal dogma that sees women's sexuality as subordinate.

### DISCUSSION

The analysis above shows that the situation of equilibrium is described when the feminine unites with the masculine. This is symbolized by the marriage of Alisha to Hendarto, Maryam to Danial, and Nak to Mak. Based on Todorov's narrative categorization, this part is called the situation of equilibrium. Based on ecofeminism, Murata (1992, 169) explains this situation, that men and women in any tradition naturally find completeness in their unity. The charm of women is what causes both men and women to desire marriage. Marriage is traditionally seen as a symbol of the union between men and women in which the objective is to maintain balance in life. Therefore, the event of marriage is categorized as a situation of balance.

Murata (1992, 169) explains that in the tradition of Sufism and eastern spirituality, marriage is seen as the highest form of good deed or predicate. It is seen as a form of worship that brings balance to the souls of men and women. In the three narratives, marriage is shown to bring happiness to both the male and female characters. This is signified by the fact that the married couples in the narratives strived to form a happy family. Marriage was also portrayed to give dignity and honor to women. Alisha (in the film *Sundelbolong*) stopped being a sex worker after she got married to Hendarto. Therefore, the dignity of Alisha was restored. A man who experiences marriage to a woman is a depiction of a natural marriage that brings prosperity upon the earth. It is a legitimate marriage agreed by nature, religion, and tradition. It is a depiction of a marriage that generates happiness for the woman and her family. This marriage gives birth to the children of nature.

Furthermore, the separation of feminine and masculine follows their union. Todorov explains this as the break of equilibrium or the break of the balance because in this separation of masculine and feminine does occur the problem or imbalance. As can be seen, while the masculine characters are away, the female characters act as the guardians of the property. The property here can be seen as the female's dignity, the land, gold, and other inheritance. In addition, the separation happens when the masculine is called out to fight to the depend their country or to earn money. Consequently, they abandon their land and leave the females alone and sad at their home, guarding the property. As the female signifies the earth, the lone, sad female characters symbolize the unattended land or nature.

While guarding the property, the invaders disturb, kill, or rob, as shown in two films, SB and PHSM. Meanwhile, the NN movie shows that the separation causes Nak to suffer. The rapping, killing, and robbery denote the exploitation and colonization of the modern methodological science, as ecofeminism points out, because modern methodology drives the exploitation and colonization (Mies and Shiva 2014; Molyneux and Steinberg 1995, 89). Therefore, the robber and the rapper represent the colonizer, the explorer, or modern science. From this, the three films have similar structures that turn female characters into ghosts. The first to note is that rape or sexual harassment instigates this transformation. Therefore, it can be said that exploitation and colonization transform a harmonic nature into devastating nature. Creed (2020, 224) shows that the forbidden union leads to the birth of a monstrous creature. As it can be seen that the marital union gives a harmonic and balanced situation as explained above, on the contrary, the forbidden union transforms the beauty into a monster.

The second basis of this transformation is that the beautiful characters died in a very miserable and suffering condition. This suffering is caused by their weak, beautiful bodies that are unable to fight against masculine domination who rape and robs them. They suffer because of the absence of the masculine to guard them. Therefore, with the transformation of an attractive, beautiful face into a sinister ghost and their return, female ghost characters are fighting against exploitation, so that those who commit it vanish from the face of the earth. A ghostly face is a manifestation of feminine power to subdue men who do not act on the basis of love. A

transformation of a beautiful face into a ghostly one gives power to women, as when they are alive, they have no power to resist men who are not original parts of their lives. In the three films, it was shown that the absence of men caused women to be powerless against the court in SB, against the power of men in PHSM, and against the kingdom in NN. Ghosts, in these cases, are manifestations of feminine power in a form that is opposite to the meanings of women, such as passive and beautiful. A similar tone was also found by Lee and Mahyuddin (2015), Lai (2014), Izuddin (Izharuddin 2020), and (Aziz 2020), who state the women's empowerment in the gothic stories in Southeast Asia.

The fundamental women empowerment that can be seen in the plot of the story is that the monstrous females return to revenge against their invaders, exploiters, and rappers. In this sense, these narratives control the male aggressiveness and domination toward the signification of beautiful women in the way that the imagination of a monstrous female reins men in to approach beautiful women in the nature of Southeast Asia. Horrifying constructions attributed to the three female characters insert images of males' fear of castration that they resist. As an illustration, Alisha's holey back represented a *vagina dentata* (toothed vagina). In the theory of feminine monstrosity, a *vagina dentata* represents a female's body and sexuality that are viewed as ambiguous things. The ambiguity comes from the ambivalence of the image of vaginas in the mind of boys: desired and feared at the same time. This is in line with the sayings of Freud as quoted by Creed (1993) regarding castration and *vagina dentata*. With that ambivalence, a woman's body and the desires that live in and through it are seen as monsters, a woman's body is seen as *vagina dentata*, a delicate feminine gate, sensual, and tempting, but is full of serrations that are ready to pounce and murder those who are tempted to enter it. This is exactly the image shown in *Sundelbolong's* holey back. Similarly, this horrifying illustration can also be seen in the name of "*Sundelbolong*," in which "*Sundel*" means 'sex-worker' and "*bolong*" means "hole," which refers to the hole in the back of the ghost. According to the legend, the hole is full of maggots. This hole represents a vagina; the hole in the back of a sex-worker ghost substitutes her dangerous vagina, which may transmit venereal diseases. A hole in the back strengthens disgust towards the body anomaly and can be categorized as body horror. A "filthy hole" becomes the "brand" of *Sundelbolong*, which symbolizes her stigma during her lifetime before turning into a ghost on account of suicide or murder at the hands of rapists. This can also be seen in the film *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam*, which uses the name of a female ghost who died during labor: "*Pontianak*" and the use of "*Sundal Malam*" which refers to the image of a woman as a court dancer.

Similarly, Creed unveils that during the Vietnam War, the American soldiers were afraid to approach Vietnamese women because of the fear that they would put the bladder in their vagina. This creates fear for the soldier and controls them to be away from native women. As a result, the fear of a bladed vagina allows Vietnamese women to exercise their power. So does the fear of monstrous females of Southeast Asia allow females of the native countries to exercise their powerful and untouchable position.

Despite their similarities, these three films have obvious differences. Based on the structural analysis, it is found that the SB and NN have similarities in solving the ghost problem in the way

that the presence of a religious leader helps the society return the monstrous feminine to their world. Meanwhile, PHSM did not show the involvement of religious leaders to help them solve the problem, SB and NN show the presence of religious masculine men to guide the monstrous female return to their world. In the film *Sundelbolong*, a spiritual leader was able to calm the ghost of Alisha. Alisha cried and realized that her realm should no longer be the same as that of Hendarto. Alisha repented after a spiritual leader explained this to her. In a similar way, in the film *Nang Nak*, the spiritual figure that calmed the ghost of Nak is a Buddhist monk named Somdej Phra Puttajan of Thonburi.

Meanwhile, a spiritual leader is absent in the film PHSM; the terrors of Maryam towards Marsani were not stopped by a spiritual leader, someone who does not understand the conflict. In this case, this film placed Marsani and her family as the parties that were being demanded to take responsibilities as depicted towards the end of the film. As the end of the film shows the birth of new offspring of Marsani, and his son-in-law was haunted by Maryam, the film shows that Maryam will keep coming to the male offspring of Marsani as long as they do not return her wealth. This scene shows a threat to the invader, the exploiter, and the rapper of the Malay land. Therefore, it is understandable that all studies related to Pontianak portray the figure as a powerful feminist woman. Meanwhile, the presence of religion in the Indonesian Ghost is the depiction of patriarchal power to conquer the land, as shown by Duile (2020).

## CONCLUSION

The narrative of the monstrous female in Southeast Asia has similarities and differences; the similarities can be seen in that the three films describe the union of feminine and masculine, giving birth to a situation of equilibrium. and the separation as well as the forbidden union of masculine and feminine, and the suffering of the female give birth to the monster. This transformation allows the loss of balance. The loss of balance in the world allows the masculine to reestablish the balance by presenting a religious leader. This shows the powerful position of religion to reestablish the equilibrium caused by the exploitation and domination of modern knowledge. It shows there is an unconscious desire to go back to religion to reestablish the chaotic situation caused by modern methodology in Indonesia and Thailand. Meanwhile, the absence of religion in Malaysian film shows a strong message that human beings and their offspring should take responsibility for the consequences of the harm that they have created.

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