

The Comparation And Fundamental Purpose Of Existence Between Indonesian Versus American Urban Legends In The Movies

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Abstract. The existence of urban legend is believed by many people to this day. Each region certainly has a similarity or difference in concept and purpose from urban legends; this is because urban legends are the reflection of the existing socio-cultural existence in a society. This research is in a form of literature study that focuses on American and Indonesian urban legend horror figures in the movies. The purpose of this research is to make comparisons of urban legend horror figures in America and Indonesia, moreover, to ascertain the purpose of their existence in the movies. Descriptive qualitative method is used in this research by comparing the existence of urban legend figures from two different cultures, and also finding the main purpose behind the creation process of these figures. The result obtained from the basic idea of urban legend horror storytelling in Indonesia and America, is based on the motive of revenge. Some characteristics that are different are that the urban legend horror figures in Indonesian movies emphasize the character of ghosts based on the experiences and beliefs from the Indonesian people which is dominant with Indonesian culture, while the characters of ghost figures in America are the pure result of a fictional character creation process and have a very strong peculiarity of American culture. The urban legend horror figures in Indonesia aim to provide moral and ethical learning to the public to respect and obey local culture and customs. Otherwise, the existence of urban legend horror figures in America is purely entertainment.

Keywords: Urban legend horror figures, comparison, concept, purpose, culture.

1 Introduction

Indonesia is a country that has huge movie fans. The genres of movies that are very popular in Indonesia are romance dramas, comedy dramas and horror movies. Among the three genres, horror movies are the most popular genre in Indonesia (Tiwahyupriadi & Ayuningtyas, 2020). Several movie titles such as '*Kuntilanak*' (2006), '*Malam Satu Suro*' (1988), '*Sundel Bolong*' (1981), '*Beranak Dalam Kubur*' (1971) '*Pengabdi Setan*' (1980) which was later remade with the same title '*Pengabdi Setan*' (2017), '*Pocong: The Origins*' (2019) as well as many other Indonesian horror movie titles that actually raise mystical stories based on beliefs, myths, cultures and customs of the Indonesian people as the background for the movie. The storytelling concepts of these Indonesian horror movies have different characteristics from the American horror movie storytelling concept.

Hollywood also has various popular horror movies that come with the 'slasher' genre such as the 'Halloween' series (1978-2022), 'Friday the 13th' (1980-2009), A 'Nightmare on Elm Street' (1984-2010). Indonesia and America have the same concept; they present tense and scary scenes through urban legend figures from each region. This becomes interesting because actually there is a very significant difference between the concept of ghosts in Indonesian and American horror movies. The ghosts in Indonesian movies are concepts that emerge and exist in local beliefs (cults), culture and myths. Imanjaya (2014) stated that Indonesian horror movies in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s which focused more on exploitation and the concept of formulas for beliefs and myths of society became a trend and were very popular in Indonesian society. On the other hand, the existence of ghosts that appear in American movies is purely the creation of fictional characters and created solely for entertainment needs, so it is interesting to be followed. Stewart (2013) argues that the existence of zombie creations as apocalyptic horror fiction characters has developed and is very popular in American culture. This zombie character has become an American horror icon born of the imagination of the American people.

Although the two concepts of urban legends storytelling from Indonesia and America are very different, there is a common element, namely 'revenge' as the main thing that is raised in the story of horror movies from both Indonesia and America. This study is a literature study which focuses comparing Indonesian and American urban legend horror movies, and also revealing the purpose of the existence of Indonesian and American urban legend characters in horror movies. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a comparative literature and sociological approach.

2 Research Methodology

2.1. Qualitative Research Method

A research which is using qualitative methods focuses on analytical and descriptive skills. Analysis with a subjective perspective and supported by a theoretical basis to interpret an object of research with an explanation presented in a structured manner.

Taylor, Steven, J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, Marjorie (2016) expresses the idea that a researcher who uses qualitative methods always tries to explain the meaning and messages conveyed by someone, his research is inductive and holistic, is able to think about how other people think and act in everyday life, has a strong perspective in researching something, focuses on the significance of the research, and the qualitative method is a skill in conducting an analysis. Leavy (2017) states that this qualitative method provides an opportunity for everyone of us to build a strong understanding of a topic, revealing the meaning of an activity, situation, person, and object.

This research applies a descriptive qualitative method to compare two concepts of adaptation of ghost storytelling in Indonesian and American horror movies and to reveal the meaning of their existence in the movie.

2.2. Comparative Literature

Comparing two things or more is included in the scope of comparative studies. Two literary works from one country or even two or more countries, from the same media or adapted

to another media, can be compared to find the message and social criticism behind the work. Comparing the literary work from one or various places is very important to reveal and study the existing cultural diversification and also the characteristics of a work.

Remak in Damono (2009) explains in detail about the existence of a comparative literature study. Comparative literature studies have a broad scope, this study studies things outside the boundary of a country and studies the correlation between literature and other fields of science and beliefs in terms of art (painting, sculpture, building art, drama, performance, movie and music), philosophy, history and social sciences (politics, economics, sociology), science, religion and others. We can conclude that comparative literature studies are comparing literary works of a country with literary works of other countries and comparing literary works with other fields as a form of complete life.

According to Remak's statement, it can be concluded that comparative literature has two tendencies, literature must be compared with literature and furthermore literature can be compared with art and even other disciplines. Comparative literature does not always focus on the scope of literature and within a single country, but can go beyond the boundaries of a country to gain a better understanding of trends and movements occurring in various nations and countries in the world (Damono, 2009).

2.3. Sociology and Cultural Value in Contemporary Literature

The existence of a literary work which is a fictitious work of the author is not merely a work of fiction that only tells lullabies to its readers, a literary work is a fictional work which is a reflection of real life as a form of anxiety and restlessness of what is felt by the author.

Studying a literary work certainly cannot be separated from studying the culture, history and beliefs that exist in society. Literary works are very thick with social and humanities values so that they are able to provide a lesson to the community and can become role models for the wider audience.

In the view of structuralism, a literary work must have a narrative element that has a story-building structure such as themes, plots, settings, and characters. Cobley in Nayar (2010) states that narrative is a form of certain representation that implements signs. The concept of narrative is not as narrow as just a sign, but narrative is also the shaper of nation, history, sport and violence. Paul Wake has defined narrative as the 'way' in which we construct ideas about history, politics, race, religion, identity, and time. All of this can then be understood as a story that explains and constructs how the world 'lives' (Nayar, 2010)

The concept of narrative in the perspective of structuralism has a very close correlation with the sociology of society and cultural values in the life of modern society. Contemporary literary works that exist today refer to previous literary works but have developed and are much more complex. The complexity of this modern literary work cannot be separated from the norms, culture and beliefs of the people that have existed since time immemorial.

Within the scope of the study of eastern culture, namely in Indonesia, the concept of public belief which is disseminated from generation to generation in the form of advice and

prohibitions on something is believed to provide learning and moral messages, so people will not violate the norms and traditions of the local culture.

The concept of mystical belief that exists in society has become a widely circulated myth that aims to serve as a guide so that Indonesian people still uphold their local culture so they become more polite and respectful towards others. This concept serves to be honest and provide boundaries for the Indonesian people to keep doing good deed and to not hurting fellow human beings. For example, the emergence of '*pocong*' and '*kuntilanak*' manifestations that will appear after Maghrib/ dusk or at night actually if examined more deeply has a message to the younger generation is prohibited to go out at night and remain stays at home.

Tiwahyupriadi & Ayuningtyas (2020) explained that horror stories with mystical themes and the same concept of storytelling are repeated over and over again. Indonesian people really like horror and mystical stories that are based on legends of the people who live there. The existence of mystical stories and scary myths has been shaped and made in such a way with the aim of providing learning to the community to respect others, ancestors and preserve traditions and culture.

What happens in Indonesian culture is very different from the existence of horror movies in America, although most of them also carry the theme of urban legends characters, but the creations of these figures were created for entertainment purposes only. These fictional characters are made in such a way as to simply scare the audience and provide a thrilling effect. The process of creating these American horror urban legends characters adapts from modern western local myths, culture and traditions. American people also have their own spooky horror story according to their belief. Due to the modern mindset of American society which is more pragmatic they realizes that the existence of these horror characters in the movies is only adapted and created for entertainment needs as a form of modern popular culture.

The object of this research is urban legend horror characters in Indonesian horror movies compared to urban legend horror characters in American horror movies. The selection of the objects of this research is based on the differences in the concept of creating urban legend characters from Indonesian horror movies and American horror movies, as well as the purpose of creating these fictional characters in horror movies genre.

2.4. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used as the sampling technique in this research.

- a. Indonesian urban legend horror characters in Indonesian movies such as *Sundel Bolong*, *Kuntilanak*, *Pocong* and *Wewe Gombel* compare to American urban legends horror characters in American movies such as Pennywise, Jason Voorhees, Freddy Krueger, and Michael Myers.
- b. Finding the purpose of the process of creating urban legends horror characters in Indonesian movies in the form of ghost characters that are lifted from myths, legends and traditions of Indonesian society. The process of creating urban legends characters in this Indonesian horror movie is different from the process of creating American urban legends horror characters. The presence of urban legends characters in this American horror movie is based on pure fiction and its characteristics are certainly adapted with superstitious culture and

American 'horror concepts'. The existence of this urban legend character is a form of modern folklore.

3 Finding and Discussion

Horror movie is a genre that gives an extraordinary sensation to anyone who watches it; the sudden appearance of a mysterious and terrible figure is a repetitive pattern that often appears in horror movies, both Indonesian and American horror movies.

Tiwahyupriadi & Ayuningtyas (2020) states that Indonesian movies always focus on the same pattern and ignore the main aspects of storytelling. The repetitive concept of horror stories in Indonesian movies also often places female ghosts as urban legend figures in storytelling. Some of the ghosts that appear in Indonesian horror movies are dominated by female ghosts who have the same motivation, namely planning to take revenge for her death.

American horror movies are also filled with terrible and sadistic characters, the main motivation is revenge, but spreading terror is another motivation besides revenge. American horror movies prioritize 'gore' and sadistic killing of its victims. This is of course slightly adapted by Indonesian horror movies by showing scary urban legend ghost figures but not so directly showing sadistic killing scenes. Indonesian horror movies and American horror movies have several differences and similarities which can be shown as follows:

3.1. The Revenge

The main, most basic concept of most horror movies is the element of revenge. The revenge is the main action taken by the 'horror characters'. Their motivation is to take revenge for what others have done to them.

The ghost stereotype which is an urban legend in Indonesian horror movies often features a woman with a very sad and tragic background. This background causes most urban legends in Indonesia to be dominated by the existence of female ghost figures such as *kuntilanak*, *wewe gombel* and *sundel bolong* because these female ghosts are victims of rape and are pregnant. Moreover, they are killed by irresponsible people. The existence of *kuntilanak*, *wewe gombel* and *sundel bolong* is an adaptation of Indonesian people's belief in real life about the existence of various ghosts with scary female figures who often appear and disturb residents.

On the other hand, *pocong* is a horror character in Indonesian movies that is very popular and closely related to the religious culture in Indonesia, which is predominantly Muslim. The *pocong* ghost in the Indonesian horror movie is an urban legend adapted from the Islamic religious way which buries a person's body by wrapping it in a shroud. This *pocong* figure is then presented in the movie based on the public's belief in the abundance of news about the appearance of this creature in real life and disturbing residents in few areas in Indonesia. Several ghost characters in this Indonesian horror movie, which are urban legends, have similar motivations, namely hunting their targets to take revenge for their deaths.

The concept of an urban legend characters in an Indonesian horror movie will hunt and kill the target for revenge and then they will stop carrying out his actions if the desired target is dead, then the ghost will disappear and go to the afterlife.



Figure 1: The scene of '*Sundel Bolong*' who has managed to get her revenge, then she meet the community before returning to the afterlife (the original movie '*Sundel Bolong*', 1981)

According to the American horror movies, the characters that become urban legends in horror movies are the creations of movie writers or directors. Bailey (2013) states that every horror movie is a monster, whether the monster is literally shown with a terrible figure or is only implied through the psychological condition of the character that is distorted. The presence of an urban legend in the form of a monster is shown as a mysterious and scary serial killer. American horror characters are made more expressionless or conversely made more extreme to dramatize the interpretation and description of the character.

Urban legends in American horror movies are like a killing machine. We can start with Jason Voorhees. This killing machine lives eternally in Camp Crystal Lake and will slaughter anyone he meets because of his revenge for the death of his mother (Pamela Voorhees) and his death by drowning in a lake in the Camp Crystal Lake area. Freddy Krueger from Elm Street who is believed to still remain alive in dreamland and haunts children through nightmares. This was done by Freddy because he wanted to take revenge on anyone for his death by being burned alive by the parents of the victims of the murder committed by him.

Michael Myers is a terror machine that hunts down random targets and his motivation to kill remains a mystery. His main goal to always kill anyone in his presence was to spread terror and fear in his hometown, Haddonfield, Illinois. Along with its development Michael Myers hunts anyone anywhere for things that are still mysterious.

Pennywise, with the form of 'dancing clown' is one of the representations of horror characters created by American horror novel author Stephen King who is a super creature from the void dimension (the dimension where the entire universe is located) who comes and haunts

children in the fictional city in America called Derry, Maine. American society really idolizes urban legends characters in the form of clowns and undead (humans who are infected with a deadly virus so that they turn into zombies).

3.2. Religious Leader 'Kyai' or 'Ustad' Compares to Common People as hero

The presence of religious leaders, namely 'kyai' or 'ustad' in Indonesian horror movies is a message that the director wants to convey to the audience. The presence of these religious leaders is a reflection of moral learning in order to teach us all to be obedient to religious orders. The emergence of 'kyai' or 'ustad' in Indonesian horror movies is able to defeat the forces of evil. The existence of the 'kyai' or 'ustad' as a religious figure is certainly a symbol of religious motivation to the audience, because the majority of the Indonesian people are Muslim.



Figure 2: The depiction of religious leaders (*kyai/ustad*) fight the evil genies in Indonesian horror drama '*Misteri Gunung Merapi*' episode 69

The moral message that the director wants to convey to the audience is that people are more obedient in carrying out worship and stay away from superstitious beliefs. Religious figures in Indonesian horror movies are presented to provide lessons that religious power can defeat evil things and protect us all from the threat of danger.

The existence of religious figures in American movies is also often indicated by the presence of priests who try to fight evil spirits or urban legends characters. The existence of religious figures in American horror movies is not the same as the existence of religious figures in Indonesian horror movies. Religious figures in American horror movies are shown more as a complement and are very easy to be defeated by antagonist characters in the form of urban legends.

The presence of the protagonist in American horror movies is often shown to be weak, unarmed and filled with extreme fear to the point of despair. This protagonist is often shown by a group of teenagers or individual character who are trying hard to find a way to escape or find a way to cripple the enemy (urban legends characters) who are always hunting him. The pattern that can be found in defeating the antagonists is to kill them the way these urban legends died before.

3.3. Specific Weapon

The process of creating urban legends in horror movies is often ‘seasoned’ with violence to increase the suspenseful effect in the story. In telling Indonesian horror movies, it seems more ‘refined’ by minimizing the appearance of blood and sadistic elements. This is because the culture that exists in Indonesian society is influenced by eastern culture and of course this is unethical when a movie shows sadistic and brutality that exceeds the limit. Referring to this, the Indonesian urban legends horror characters in the movie do not have specific weapons to hunt their targets.

According to American horror movies, sadistic and brutality are included in the concept of the entertainment so that whatever is shown to the public through movies is purely entertainment. American horror movie genre called ‘slasher’ literally showing sadistic scenes of slashing, wielding knives and even cutting body parts complete with scenes of blood gushing out are commonplace and are considered very entertaining. For example: Jason Voorhees with a machete that never leaves his grip ready to slash his victim’s head, Freddy Krueger with a knife-toed glove that can rip the victim’s body apart, Michael Myers with a kitchen knife as his main weapon in killing each target . This depiction ‘sadistic and terrible monsters’ is as suspenseful entertainment.



Figure 3: The scene from American horror movie shows the bleeding hand that is wielding a kitchen knife ('Halloween Kills', 2021)

3.4. The Contrast and Purpose of Creating the Urban Legend Characters in a Movie

The scary characters that appear in this horror movie cannot be separated from Indonesia ‘people belief’ which is conveyed orally. Belief in the figure of these scary ghosts is also connected to the traditions and culture of a region or territory. The presence of ghosts as Indonesian urban legend figures is the result of the interpretation of Indonesian society which is dominant with local imagination, tradition, and culture.

The Indonesian people’s belief of these scary ghosts then adapted into the movies and achieved great success in the movie industry. Suzzanna as an actress with the nickname ‘Queen of Indonesian horror Movie’ has succeeded in portraying *Sundel Bolong* in the movie ‘*Malam Satu Suro*’ (1988), a female ghost in the movie entitled ‘*Beranak dalam Kubur*’ (1972), Becoming the queen of genie in the movie ‘*Ajian Ratu Laut Kidul*’ (1991) and besides that,

there are many other Indonesian horror movies which have been adapted based on the beliefs and culture of the Indonesian people.

The process of creating scary fictional characters in this American horror movie has a similar concept to what happened in Indonesia. These scary masked psychopathic killers have made this 'slasher' genre so popular and transformed into what is believed to be an urban legend in American culture.

Koven (2008) states that conceptually, the existence of horror characters is formed based on oral stories that are usually conveyed by the American people as a form of oral literature and then brought to the big screen and become a form of belief that is believed by the public. Smith in Koven (2008) also states that most of the legends and stories that are believed by the public, are then manifested into movies and television as cultural discourse. It is a form of popular cinema that reflects and transmits the traditions of popular belief.

Although there are similarities between the two concepts of the process of creating horror characters in Indonesian and American horror movies, there are fundamental differences in the cultural concepts in these two countries. Horror characters adapted from people belief in Indonesia have characteristics according to Indonesian culture, and vice versa. The interesting thing here is that horror characters from Indonesian urban legends will have no effect on horror characters from American urban legends.

For example, when we bring *kuntilanak* and *pocong* characters to American movies, of course they will not be as popular as Jason Voorhees or Michael Myers. The American people will not be afraid and may not even know what *kuntilanak* and *pocong* are, this is because there are different cross-cultures that cause the existence of urban legend creatures in one country not necessarily known by other countries.

Indonesian ghost characters adapted from urban legends of Indonesian society are based more on eastern customs (traditional culture that has been passed down from several generations) have more simple manifestations, while ghost characters in American horror movies have more modern and dominant with western culture.

Pocong and *kuntilanak* in Indonesian horror movies, as the legend manifestation of the Indonesian people. They only wear simple clothes in the form of white cloth. When compared to American horror movies, American urban legend characters have much more modern iconic costumes such as Freddy Krueger wearing a sweater or Michael Myers wearing a wearpack. This is proof that the process of adapting the legend of society into the movie is very different. Conceptually, the creation process has similarities, but in its representation, ghosts in Indonesian horror movies are purely what Indonesian people believe. The creation concept of 'slasher' horror fiction characters in American urban legends depicts psychopathic creatures with a purely creative appearance for entertainment purposes only.



Figure 4: American slasher movie shows the villain versus villain scene in ‘Freddy vs Jason’ (2003)

3.5. Social Aspects from the Presence of Mythical Urban Legends in Society

Folktales or legends in Indonesian society that are made into movies have the aim of providing moral learning, respecting traditions, customs and maintaining cultural attitudes and norms in society. Furthermore, Indonesian horror movies teach us to always pray for our ancestors, parents and relatives in the afterlife. According to the belief of the Indonesian people, which consists of various tribes and customs, there is a pattern of uniformity, namely the existence of traditional culture that is passed down from generation to generation. This has become a myth or belief that gives a message of learning to the community to obey local customs and cultural tradition.

For example, in Javanese culture, there is a tradition called ‘*Uluk Salam*’ or give greetings when in a quiet and dark place such as in cemeteries and empty houses. When passing through a dark tunnel, people often honk their car horns to give a sign as a form of asking for permission to pass through the area. Another belief inherent in other Indonesian traditions is the creation of ghost characters which are myths in society that are created to ‘scare’ children in order to teach them a moral lesson to obey their parents. This is indicated by the myth that ‘*Wewe Gombel*’ will kidnap children who are still playing outside at dusk. Other myths such as stealing and keeping *pocong*’s rope will make a man who dares to do it become rich.

These beliefs are maintained for generations. The purpose from creating the myth is to make local community obeys and preserves cultural tradition. The existence of these ghost creatures is then represented and adapted into a fictional character in the movie. Their characteristics and form in accordance with the imagination and interpretation of beliefs from the ancestral stories of their respective areas. On the other hand, American society has its own way of believing in myths and legends in a particular area. Pragmatic-minded Americans are far more likely to believe in anything if they have experienced it firsthand. Things that have story content beyond reason or illogical will certainly not be easily believed by them.

Horror stories that appear based on people imagination are conveyed verbally from one individual to another and then have been transformed into horror characters that are trusted by the wider community. The basic difference between these two cultures (Indonesian and American) is the purpose of the creation process. In Indonesian society, the process of creating horror characters is based on the manifestation of community beliefs based on local customs and culture. These urban legends appear so that people respect their local cultural traditions. The adaptation process of people stories or legends about horror and scary creatures into this movie is a process of popular culture creation which later became a horror icon in American society. The existence of these horror characters is purely for entertainment.

4 Conclusion

The existence of urban legends adapted into horror movies is something that is in great demand by the audience. The narrative concept and the creative process of horror characters in Indonesian and American horror movies have few similar backgrounds, namely legends, folklore or local people beliefs about a scary thing which are then transformed into horror movies. The similarity of the concept of storytelling is always having the same pattern on the problem of revenge. The presence of Islamic religious figures as heroes in Indonesian horror movies is a characteristic of Indonesian culture which is based on the Islamic religious belief. Heroes in American horror movies are often portrayed as weak and frightened protagonists, but with all their efforts, the main character can finally defeat the villain. The use of specific and iconic weapons and costumes often appears in American horror movies.

The similarity of these concepts is not exactly the same, but the purpose of creating fictional characters that are adapted from the legends of this society has different characteristics due to cross-culturalism. In Indonesian horror movies, the scary horror characters are adapted from folklore, legends or beliefs of the local community to send a message to the audience to always respect, protect and preserve the culture and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. Through this Indonesian horror movie, it also gives a moral message to do good deed and not to commit a crime which will result in severe consequences. On the Contrary, in American horror movies, the emphasis is on violence and brutality by urban legend horror characters because American horror movies are produced for entertainment. This kind of horror movies is as a form of modern popular culture.

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