

The Corporeal and Monstrosity of Supernatural Entities: Towards a Socio-Functional Illustration of Pontianak In Tunku Halim's "Horror Stories"

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ABSTRACT

Female characters in horror fiction are often constructed by the image of their body, which emphasises an innermost marker as sexual beings. The current study focuses on the depiction of Pontianak, a supernatural entity famous in Malay folklore, in selected short stories written by Tunku Halim. A critical discourse method, Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework, was incorporated to analyse data. Lexical structures, as expressed in the selected texts, are analysed, and findings demonstrate the existence of corporeal and monstrosity elements associated with Pontianak. The entity is sexualised and depicted as connected with evil, as she resorts to violence to satisfy her desires, ultimately disparaging the patriarchal cocoon in which a Malay woman is confined. The character portrayal of the Pontianak in Malay folklore exhibits elements of sexual discrimination and evil, as seen in the emphasis on her physical attributes and characteristics. This portrayal blurs the boundaries between supernatural entities and sexual magnetism, highlighting the interconnection between gender and power dynamics. This representation highlights the notion that to escape this oppression, the realm of horror becomes crucial. Within this realm, female characters possess destructive abilities and the capacity for retribution, but this can only be achieved through their association with the supernatural world of malevolent forces. These narratives provide a platform for exploring themes of empowerment and resistance against patriarchal dominance.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; horror stories; Pontianak; supernatural entities; women in fiction

INTRODUCTION

"Traditional culture often plays a prominent role in oppressing women. Men have often used and still use traditional culture in order to benefit themselves at the expense of women. The way men hold on to these gender inequalities shows that somewhere in their subconscious mind, they fear that, if they give women a chance, they will be overpowered."

(Kwatsha, 2009, pp. 127–156)

Gender as a concept expresses diverse male and female qualities in society depending on their social construction. Women are generally depicted as weak, calm, sweet, and emotional, while men are described as powerful, tough, strong and wise (Hardiyanti et al., 2018; Jamal, 2015). These stereotypes detrimentally affect dynamic gender roles, especially in patriarchal societies, where women face flagrant discrimination in many ways. In Pakistan, for example, all the privileges of decision-making and power-structuring are enjoyed by men, while women are frequently treated as objects having no identity (Khan, 2019). Similarly, the male-female dichotomy persists across the world, as indicated by literary works that regularly become the subject of scholarly inquiry.

Literature mirrors the perceptions and attitudes of the society that portrays human life through characters (Gassman, 2006; Rashidi et al., 2014; Vyomakesisri, 2017). Female and male

writers are known to project female characters differently. According to Osterhaus (1987), having men as the most well-known and well-respected writers throughout history has resulted in “images of women in literature that are products of a creative process that has a limited perspective”. This idea was supported by other scholars such as Purbani (2013) and Marcu (2016), with the latter mentioning that the picture built by the opposite sex is hypertrophied because “the experiences are only a mirage, an imagination, not disclosed to conscience”. Female inferiority is portrayed constantly in literature through objectification (Gumede & Mathonsi, 2019; Hardiyanti et al., 2018; Marcu, 2016). Various studies like Pangastuti (2019) and Osman (2018) show that the pivotal theme of women suffering negative consequences for fighting for their freedom and becoming victims of their actions is abundantly found in the world of literature, depicting women in a negative light.

As one of the most popular genres in fiction, horror has its own fashion in portraying women. Ghosts serve as cultural representations of societal fears, anxieties, and taboos (Cohen, 1996). They embody the "other," challenging normative boundaries and highlighting the complexities of identity and difference (Bakhtin, 1984; Cohen, 1996). Monsters are not simply creatures of horror; they are complex symbols that reflect the cultural and historical contexts in which they emerge (Cohen, 1996; Creed, 1993). Whether in ancient mythology, folklore, or contemporary popular culture, monsters have a profound impact on shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us (Cohen, 1996; Halberstam, 1995). By studying monsters, we gain insights into the collective imagination, social norms, and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and belief (Carroll, 1990; Cohen, 1996).

In Thai contemporary literature, for example, female characters have to evolve into ghosts to gain enough power to compete with male domination (Piayura & Sorthip, 2016), while in Chinese culture, women are associated with the Hungry Ghost because the concept of “yin”, the lower position in “yin and yang”, is considered to be female (Balraj, 2011). The stories of female ghosts always involve women’s love and sexual behaviour in the patriarchal context (Piayura & Sorthip, 2016). Alisa, a character in the Indonesian movie *Sundel Bolong* (1981), is seen as a sex worker ghost who seduces and lures her male victims to engage in sexual intercourse (Pangastuti, 2019). Therefore, in the horror genre, it may be concluded that women generally do not escape discrimination as female characters continue to be presented as sexual victims (Sa’eed & Jubran, 2019).

Gender and women's subjectivity play significant roles in Malay culture. Traditionally, Malay society is characterised by a patriarchal structure where gender roles are clearly defined and enforced (Ahmad, 2018). Women are typically assigned as caretakers of the household and are specifically expected to prioritise their family's needs over their individual aspirations (Majid, 2019). This power imbalance reinforces gender inequalities and limits women's access to education, employment opportunities, and participation in public life (Abdul Rahman, 2021; Mahani & Noh, 2019).

In the Malaysian scene of horror, female ghosts continue to be portrayed in sexually compromising ways. In the story of *Hantu Pisang* (loosely translated as 'The Ghost of the Banana Tree'), young men would tie a long piece of thread or string around a banana tree and lead it to their bedroom, hoping that the female ghost would visit them for sexual activity. Such stories put emphasis on ghosts who gratify the needs of men, revealing her promiscuity (Nicholas et al., 2013). Nicholas and her colleagues further discovered that the majority of stories featuring female ghosts position them in a typical binary: (1) as the type of woman with whom one just has sex and (2) as the type of woman one marries. The idea of the Pontianak-human as the ideal woman, a perfect

wife and mother, compared to the Pontianak ghost that embodies everything unpalatable in women, suggests that women who do not fulfil their sexual roles with men are abnormal (Nicholas et al., 2013). In short, women across horror fiction continue to be defined by their bodies.

It is in these very contexts that the paper is framed; this study aims to unveil the representation of female ghost characters in Malay folklore, specifically Pontianak. In order to achieve this, Fairclough's three-dimensional approach is incorporated into the analysis of several short stories as expressed in "Horror Stories" written by a Malaysian author, Tunku Halim.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN FICTION

The art of storytelling is a universal activity, but its forms and contents depend heavily on its cultural and historical contexts (Comiskey, 1994). As fiction writers try to simulate real-life characters, how men and women are perceived in society generally forms the tapestry of short stories. This practice has since been implemented for ages as male and female language in Shakespeare's characters bears a resemblance with modern texts (Argamon et al., 2003). For example, in her study in 2013, Hua argues that the vocabulary of women's language in the 1881 novel *Sense and Sensibility* is unique as it contains extravagant adjectives, intensifiers, swear words or expletives, and diminutives characteristic of Lakoff's formulation of women language (see Lakoff, 1990, p. 209). In a separate study, men are found to prefer 'report talk', which signifies more independence and proactivity, while women tend to prefer 'rapport talk', which encompasses agreeing, understanding, and supporting attitudes in situations (Corney et al., 2002).

Besides linguistics, women in fiction are also bound to stereotypes in terms of their capabilities. In several studies, the likes of Weitzman et al. (1972), Hamid et al. (2008), and Abdullah (2015), male and female characters are often assigned gender-specific activities, tasks, and roles. Females are usually assigned with domestic chores and child-bearing tasks, while males are typically assigned with more significant outdoor activities, becoming the breadwinners. According to Clark and Zyngier (1998), in the 'golden age' of detective fiction, sleuthing is primarily the province of men while women as detectives merely work as helpers to the male police. In historical fiction for young people, the absence or loss of a male character results in independence or displaced dependence, enforcing the stereotype of females always needing help and support from others in order to survive (Gassman, 2006). Meanwhile, in folktales, various stereotypes generally contribute to the perception that women as labourers, barren women, and women who persevere in marriages are typically rewarded for it (Masuku, 2005).

The biggest influence on the portrayal of women in fiction probably lies in the world's interminable patriarchal societies. Women are typically regarded as the weaker sex, remaining subordinate to men (Lei, 2006). For example, female characters in the novel, set against the backdrop of Egypt, *Mudzakkirat Thobibah*, are described as women who "accept" their fate having to serve men (Helmanita et al., 2018), an observation that draws parallels to medieval literature that illustrates how women comply with the narrow roles of wives and mothers (Vyomakesisri, 2017). Elsewhere, multiple studies investigated male and female authors who portray women characters differently. According to Mathye (2003) and Machaba (2011), male authors tend to portray female characters negatively, with the latter revealing male Xitsonga poet biasedness against women for depicting women as unfaithful, lazy, immoral, materialistic, and dependent. A study of eight Malaysian and Indonesian novels written by female authors in the early 21st century,

however, discovers that female characters wholeheartedly fight against gender discrimination and sexual abuse (Purbani, 2013).

FEMALE SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES IN FICTION

Female supernatural entities in fiction have long captivated readers with their power, mystery, and symbolic significance. These fictional characters embody various supernatural archetypes and often challenge traditional gender roles and expectations (Braidotti, 1994). Horror fiction has witnessed the abundant presence of female supernatural entities in the form of monsters, ghosts, aliens, wolves, witches, vampires, and evil demons (Chusna & Mahmudah, 2018). Usually, a female monster initially appears as a pretty and seductive woman who eventually evolves into a monstrous creature. The portrayal of woman as the monstrous feminine in the genre has its own price as it raises concerns over its reversal of the stereotypes associated with (expected) women's roles in life (Chusna & Mahmudah, 2018).

While discussing gender and stereotypes, it is hard to ignore the ones set by the patriarchal world, even in fiction. Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, for example, asserts that the male gaze reinforces gender inequalities by reducing women to passive and sexualised roles while positioning men as active viewers and agents of the narrative (Mulvey, 1975). Creed has explored this matter in her 1993 book, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, by highlighting the very notion that "woman's evil nature lies inside the body of a beautiful woman" that exists in patriarchal society. This idea is then specifically enacted through horror films and literature, exposing women to sexualisation and discrimination.

This concurs with the female sexploitation phenomenon in Indonesian horror films, which refers to the portrayal of female characters as seductive, functioning as sex symbols; their bodies are exploited to sell the films for easy profit (Imanjaya, 2010). According to Mulvey (1975), women are presented in horror films to provide *visual pleasure* in terms of the *male gaze*, which is the act of seeing females from a masculine heterosexual point of view, whereby females are represented as sexual objects, and viewers are positioned to assume that 'masculine' orientation. By drawing on this concept, Pangastuti (2019) argues that women are clearly represented as sexual objects to be savoured by heterosexual male viewers. Chusna and Mahmudah (2018) examined the depiction of the monstrous feminine in two American horror films, 2009's *Jennifer's Body* and 2015's *The Witch*. The study discovered that the construction of monstrosity in these films indicates female transgression of patriarchal boundaries. Within a patriarchal society, beauty is attached to a clean and proper body. Femininity in supernatural entities is highlighted by the true nature of their biological bodily functions, which means rejecting natural bodily functions such as blood and saliva, which are usually illustrated by their very appearance.

Even though supernatural entities are known for their attribution to some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature, female supernatural entities are bound to some sort of invisibility and powerlessness (Kindinger, 2017). According to Piayura and Sorthip (2016), female characters have to evolve into ghosts to gain enough power to overturn men's reign and position while men are still alive. Diane Long Hoeveler, for example, proposes that the female gothic has contributed to the concept of *victim feminism* – the representation of women as passive victims of patriarchy who are staged as weak, exploited, and needed to be saved in order to be reinserted into domestic life, an observation that permeates into other genres of fiction such as history (see Gassman, 2006) and romance (see Khan, 2019). This concept is common in horror movies, which depict female characters as sexual, helpless victims. While other movies have tried

to illustrate a woman as a physically powerful character, she is still, eventually, a victim (Sa'eed & Jubran, 2019). The fact that women rarely play the role of cold-blooded sequential murderers without an external power (Sa'eed & Jubran, 2019) proves that women are often underestimated. Sa'eed and Jubran (2019), who explored the role of women in two American horror films, 1996's *The Scream* and 2013's *The Conjuring*, reveal that a sexist framework exists in films to stabilise the notion that women need protection and safety. By studying films, horror as a genre is a fertile ground for privileging women the position of "hero" while also articulating the notion of women as sex symbols.

SUPERNATURAL ENTITIES IN A MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

The horror scene in Malaysia has introduced its audience to numerous supernatural entities, mainly originating from local folklore and mythology. They come in different shapes and attributes; some are discussed as aggressive, tough, competitive, and focused, while others are nurturing, relationship-oriented, and modest (Nicholas et al., 2013). Nicholas and her colleagues further argue that entities with traditionally masculine attributes tend to value material possessions or wealth, while those with traditionally feminine attributes value relationships, parenting, and quality of life. Such notions clearly have an impact on expected behaviours for men and women. When denied the traditional aspects of femininity and dignity, Malay women will turn into spirits as their means of resistance (Ong, 2010). The act of resistance portrays women as the weaker sex, thus promoting patriarchy and sexism to a greater extent.

Malaysian horror films mainly feature female supernatural entities, while male characters are rarely supernatural entities (Lee & Balaya, 2016). The number of films portraying women as evil characters has increased since the growth of horror film production in the early 21st century (Lee & Balaya, 2016). In stories where male supernatural entities exist, men are still depicted as strong and brave compared to women. For instance, the *Orang Minyak* (oily man) would abduct women and take them hostage, butcher them, sexually assault them, eat them up, or enslave them. Eventually, village men would come to the rescue and hunt this demon to "save" their women and children (Nicholas et al., 2013). In male-dominated Malaysian society, women must not be seen as more powerful than their male counterparts, and these stories seem to represent the current social situation whereby males are always more dominant as compared to females.

Several studies (e.g.; Izharuddin, 2019; Lee & Balaya, 2016; Nicholas et al., 2013) agree that Pontianak is the most feared and recognised supernatural entity in Malay folklore. According to Izharuddin (2019), the Pontianak's death at childbirth turns her into a vengeful spirit or "birth demon" (Ong, 1988) who wreaks terror on the living. The myth and belief in the existence of the Pontianak prevail among countries in Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Lee, 2016). The first Malaysian Pontianak film entitled "Pontianak" was directed by B. N. Rao and released in 1957 by Cathay-Keris. The most remarkable Pontianak movie to date is Shuhaimi Baba's "Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam", which grossed RM3.2 million in 2004 and re-popularised the horror genre in the country after a 30-year hiatus by exploiting the infamous Pontianak myth which has deep mythical roots in Asia (Lee, 2016). The Pontianak character has been the apex supernatural entity across various Malaysian horror films (Yusof et al., 2020).

IDENTITY OF THE MALAYSIAN PONTIANAK

Eyewitness accounts of the Pontianak in Lee and Balaya's study assert how the female supernatural entity is known for her high-pitched tone shrieks, long flowing hair and fangs, and ghost-like traits. They also note how she can only be subdued by striking a nail to the back of her neck. Ng (2009) backed these accounts by claiming that the Pontianak possesses similar qualities to the Western vampire, as a hybrid creature that blends Eastern and Western characteristics of a vampire. The Pontianak is locally seen as a "rebel" who goes against the patriarchal system and does not concur with how women in Malaysia are stereotyped as two-dimensional, passive, or angelic. She is portrayed as a monstrous and evil creature who uses anything within her means to achieve her goals (Lee & Balaya, 2016).

The identity of the Malaysian Pontianak embedded in people's minds is shaped by the way she is presented in fiction. Various studies like Nicholas and Kline (2010) and Izharuddin (2019) argue that this particular supernatural entity is still portrayed in a provocative manner. According to Nicholas and Kline, the story of Pontianak is evidence of patriarchal worldviews that uphold "normalised" behavioural expectations. Switching between beauty and monstrosity, affectionate and murderous, the vampire in the movie *Anak Pontianak* (1958) is not vanquished but rather is subdued by her role as a mother (Izharuddin, 2019).

Creed (1993) argues that the different representations of the monstrous feminine, such as the Pontianak, are a result of male unease with women's sexuality and power relations. Murlanch (1996) reinforces the statement by stating how woman represents the most extreme threat towards male identity. The Pontianak can be identified as dangerous and a threat that brings bad consequences to men (Doane, 1991).

Pangastuti's thesis explores female sexploitation in three different Indonesian horror films: *Sundel Bolong* (1981), *Gairah Malam III* (1996), and *Air Terjun Pengantin* (2009). Drawing on Mulvey's (1975) *visual pleasure* concept, the research shows that the sexualised images of female objectification in horror films (e.g. monstrous women luring and offering sexual satisfaction to their male victims) spark desire, leading to the voyeuristic sexual pleasure of the heterosexual male viewers. Lee and Balaya (2016) examined the representation, identity, and roles of the Malaysian cinematic Pontianak within the context of local and global horror cinemas by using the films *Sumpah Puntianak* (1958) and *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* (2014). The study notes that the cinematic representation of the Pontianak as the central figure of a narrative strays away from the stereotyped weak and submissive portrayal of women in Malaysian cinema. The Pontianak takes over the role of the strong and active character, which is often reserved for leading male characters. The study adds that she, however, needs to be destroyed for being a threat to the patriarchal society to reach a sense of normalcy despite being wronged and seeking justice. The ending of all Pontianak films always remains in favour of patriarchy.

Studies show that female supernatural entities in fiction are attached to sexualisation and gender oppression. In short, in this particular genre of horror, women are yet again defined by their bodies (Williams, 1991). Despite possessing different attributes than their human counterparts, the bodies of female ghosts are easily subjected to a diminished or degraded status than men because of cultural taboos (Ussher, 2006).

TUNKU HALIM'S "HORROR STORIES"

Tunku Halim Tunku Abdullah is a Malaysian writer who has authored several short tales and books that explore the creepy and mysterious, sometimes relying on local folklore and urban legends for inspiration. "Horror Stories" is a collection of short stories written by him. Published in 2014, the volume consists of 20 stories written between 1997 and 2007. The stories, receiving accolades as the best-selling Malaysian English fiction books of all time, focus on a variety of supernatural entities such as *bomoh* (shamans), Pontianak, vampires, and black magic. Tunku Halim's horror tales are steeped in Malaysian tradition and culture, which is the reason why it was selected as the corpus of the current study.

METHODOLOGY

The corpus for this study consists of short stories appearing in "Horror Stories" by Tunku Halim, such as 'Night of the Pontianak' and 'A Labor Day Weekend'. The current study integrates critical discourse analysis in approaching the data. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a field in which written and spoken texts are examined and analysed to uncover discursive sources of power, domination, injustice and bias (Van Dijk, 1998). It examines the relationship between text systems and techniques as well as the mechanisms and physical, political and cultural systems. Therefore, the major issue of CDA is how discourse systems represent, affirm, legitimise, replicate or question the ties of power in society (Fairclough, 1995). Data will be analysed by adopting the 3-dimensional framework by Fairclough (1995). The following figure presents the framework:

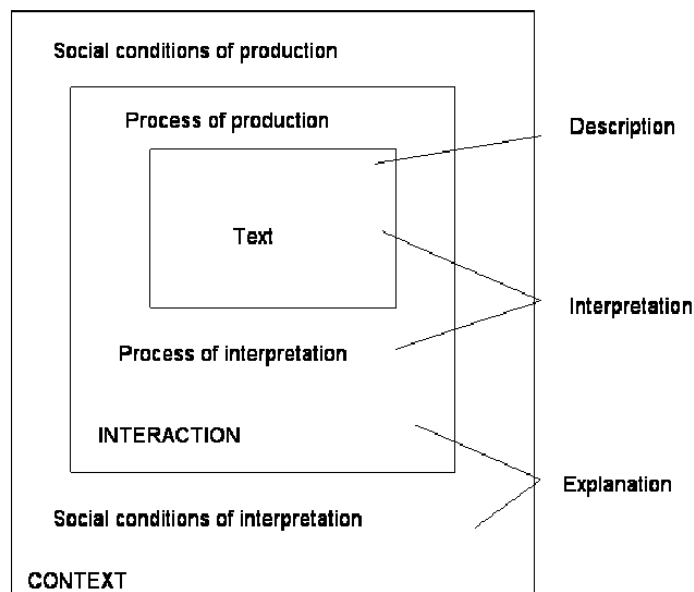


FIGURE 1. Discourse as text, interaction and context (1989, p. 25)

The researcher will examine lexical structures that involve nouns, verbs and adjectives and will attempt to draw instances from the structures in explaining the functions of discourse as a social practice.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Selecting certain linguistic words will help to realise certain discourse properties of a given text (Hazaea et al., 2014). The use of lexical structures such as noun, adjectives and verb present the readers with the chance to interpret and decode the messages in a text in identifying the embedded meanings contained within. In the selected corpus, the Pontianak is referred to through lexical structures, which associate them with elements of sexualisation. She is often described in terms of her beauty, attractiveness and sex appeal. The following table presents some examples found in the corpus.

TABLE 1. Lexical Terms with Elements of Sexualisation

Text Excerpt	Structure(s)
...a lady (1) dressed (2) in white...	(1) Common noun (2) Verb
My friend likes anything (3) in skirts. (4)	(3) Indefinite pronoun (4) Common noun
...he just stared lustily (5) at her...	(5) Post-modifier – adverb
My friend turned to see if she was pretty... (6)	(6) Post-modifier – adverb
...all he saw was the back of her head (7)...	(7) Noun phrase with post-modifier
Her long straight hair (8) falling to her waist (9)...	(8) Noun with pre-modifier (9) Noun
Hazy figure (10) in a white dress...	(10) Common noun
...long hair spiralled to her hips (11).	(11) Common noun

From the table above, examples of lexicalisation projecting towards the sexualisation of Pontianak can be observed. In example 1, the subject and verb agreement in the phrase "...a lady dressed in white..." presents the clear focus on a clear-cut description of a female body, which is further described by the post-modifier "in white". Emphasis on the colour of the dress worn by the subject is apparent as well, whereby in a majority of cultures, white symbolises elements of not only innocence but also can be interpreted as to express sexual purity.

In example 3, the role and identity of the Pontianak is insignificant due to the use of the indefinite pronoun 'anything' to refer to the entity. Indefinite pronouns in English grammar do not refer to anything specific, thus reducing and lowering the identity and individuality of the agent. Apart from that, the already negative depiction is further dented through the use of the noun 'skirt' (example 4) to describe the physical appearance of the agent. Under common cultural expectations, a skirt is synonymous with desirable female characteristics, thus projecting the entity in a lustful manner. This point is reinforced in the 5th example, whereby the male persona is shown to be doing action of staring, which is defined as an open-eyed look of interest or amazement and is considered rude in most cultures unless the person looking is performing. The rude act of staring here is described further through the addition of a post-modifier 'lustily' (example 5), which carries a negative implication towards the object or receiver, in this context, 'her'.

The value of the persona in this study is also determined through female beauty standards. Although different cultures around the world perceive idealised standards of female beauty in different ways, one common requirement needed in almost all cultures is for a female to be beautiful and pretty, and the worthiness of a female individual is parallel to the attractiveness she possesses. A similar conception is visible in this corpus whereby in example 6, the male persona turned to check if the Pontianak is pretty, thus strengthening the notion that a woman is only fit to be looked at if she fulfils certain pre-determined standards of beauty. Example 7 again shows how

the focus on the physical of the persona is deemed important, where the male persona is shown to be frustrated as he was not able to see the face of the Pontianak but only gets to observe 'the back of her head'. The concept of physical beauty is again perpetuated in this example. In Malay culture, preserving sexual attractiveness is pivotal to retaining the husband's interests, and they drink *jamu* (a potion made from herbs) to boost their vitality, sexual urges and physical shape (Mohamad Diah, 2018). The Malay *adat* (cultural customs), in this context, places emphasis on femininity and sexual attractiveness for the purpose of satisfying their husbands.

A similar connotation can be observed in example 8, whereby the writing focuses on the physical characteristics of the Pontianak, focusing on her long hair and also her waist, which basically revolves around the concept of female fecundity and the abject maternal body. The concept of the female waist in Malay culture is associated with fertility, whereby the bigger the waist, the more fertile the woman is. Shaping the waist to achieve an hourglass figure is also a common phenomenon in this culture, where women resort to tying *bengkong* (corset) to train the torso into a desired shape, such as a slimmer waist and larger bottom. The common noun 'figure' in example 9 and 'hips' in example 10, too, places stress on the outer features of a female body.

In fact, almost all the examples analysed project prominence towards the physical aspects of the Pontianak, and her image is basically constructed based on physical attractiveness and her overall feminine appearance in pleasing men, such as having a beautiful face, long straight hair, curvy waist and hips. An interesting point to ponder here is how the role of women as a means to satisfy men's sexual desires continues even after her death. In many cultures, dead souls are respected, honoured and even celebrated (e.g. Hungry Ghost Festival among the Chinese, *Famadihana* by the Malagasy people, *El Día de los Muertos* by the Mexicans, *Ari Muyang* by the Mah Meri community, *Gaijatra* by the Nepalis, *Chuseok* by South Koreans and All Saints' Day in Christianity), it is disheartening to see how the image and soul of the dead in this short story exploited sexually.

Besides being sexualised, the image of Pontianak is also associated with a woman who deviates from patriarchy and is shown to be monstrous in avenging her death. In a society where women are required to be feminine, behave modestly, wear proper attire, *lemah-lembut* (graceful), be modest and speak with a low voice tone (Omar, 1994), the image of Pontianak is depicted as defying such customs and *adat* as required by Malay culture and Islamic religion. The following table presents some extracts found in the short story which exemplifies the current point under discussion:

TABLE 2. Lexical Terms with Elements of Monstrosity

Text Excerpt	Structure(s)
...heard about a Pontianak that haunted (12) the area..	(12) That-clause with embedded verb phrase
Her eyes are huge (13). Her mouth is open (14). Her feet are not touching the ground (15).	(13) Noun with post-modifier (14) Noun with post-modifier (15) Verb phrase with post-modifier
...when Pontianak attacks (16) you...	(16) Verb phrase
...how her eyebrows like worms (17) squirmed (18) to her ears...	(17) Noun phrase with post-modifier (18) Verb phrase
...how her eyes bulged (19) ...	(19) Common noun with a verb phrase
...her fangs gleamed (20)...	(20) Common noun with verb phrase
...her jaws fell open (21) like a phyton's...	(21) Common noun with verb phrase
Her throat tore open (22) as though a jagged blade (23) had cut her flesh...	(22) Common noun with a verb phrase (23) Noun phrase with pre-modifier
Blood! (24)	(24) Noun
...great clots (25) of it slid down the curve of her neck...	(25) Noun with pre-modifier

Her head spun (26) to a cracking sound...	(26) Verb
...she grinned (27) and locked her lips...	(27) Verb
... a demon (28) whose eyes were so large...	(28) Common noun
...within those eyes squirmed a clutch of maggots (29) ...	(29) Collective nouns
She growled and slapped (30) him with one head.	(30) Series of verbs
...the Pontianak was upon (31) him...	(31) Verb phrase
Rotting face. (32)	(32) Noun with pre-modifier
Flying across (33) the road.	(33) Phrasal Verb

The examples above demonstrate the atrocity of the Pontianak through the heavy use of nouns with pre- and post-modifiers and verb phrases. Physical aspects have been clearly shown through the use of adjectives, and actions committed are portrayed through the use of verbs. In some of the examples, Pontianak is described physically as having huge bulging eyes, gleaming fangs, torn open throat and jaws, and a rotting face with maggots, an appearance that basically triggers senses of terror and fear among people. A dead person's spirit that remains in the material world (a ghost) is considered an abnormal or unpleasant state of affairs, and a reaction of fear is correlated with the concept of ghosts or revenants. Elements of blood, maggots and clots, which are basically disgusting substances, from another perspective, challenge the elements of beauty associated with females in a Malay context, thus resisting the concepts of a pure and clean body reserved for them in a normalised and acceptable cultural trait. In addition, the concept of culturally defining a woman through her body gets reinforced through the conflation of femininity with the reproductive functions of women, thus adding terms relating to that aspect, such as openings, cuts and slits and orifices. Example 22, "her throat tore open", is such an example of visual and corporeal metaphors through a cynical female perspective where the opening of the throat is synonymous with the opening of the vagina.

Furthermore, several verbs that link Pontianak to the values of a monstrous feminine are visible in the analysis as well. Table 2 presents some active verbs such as 'haunting' a place, 'attacks', 'grinned', 'growled and slapped', 'upon him' and 'flying across', which basically permeate elements of vehemence and violence. In example 16, the Pontianak 'attacks' its victims, wrecking terror, committing atrocities, and serving as a cue to lock the attention of readers to render her a female monster. This portrayal raises questions concerning its reversal of assumptions related to the typical responsibilities of women in life; such a portrayal challenges and breaks the conventional roles ascribed to women, particularly the feminine and motherly traits who are expected to nurture and care rather than destroy. The transformation from an angelic character to a monstrous feminine is also seen as an attempt to break the patriarchal parameters whereby one who is violent, ruthless, and powerful is the man, thus demystifying the idealised polarisation of male and female roles. The permanency of gender identity has been diminished by the Pontianak conduct, and the patriarchal understanding of gender roles has been destabilised. Pontianak's portrayal as a terrible figure who destroys men emphasises the relevance of gender identity in terms of monstrosity. It is a reversal of monstrous men's identities, but this time, it "is defined in terms of sexuality" as with all other stereotypes of the feminine (Creed, 1994, p.3).

CONCLUSION

Horror stories often have elements of monstrosity and exuberance, and the interpretation provided here is quite similar. Through critical discourse analysis, the identification of subtle linguistic and discursive strategies that contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities, such as stereotyping, sexualisation, and objectification, is reinforced through discourse, shedding light on the social and cultural dynamics that shape gender relations in a Malay society. Rudiments of sexual discrimination and evil are clearly embedded into the character portrayal of the Pontianak, for instance, by accentuating her physical features and characteristics, crossing the generic lines, and uniting supernatural entities with sexual magnetism. Besides, the scenes of maltreatment, explicit representation of wounded bodies, and the spectacular and repetitive display of bloody attacks are pronounced as stereotypical to this entity, mirroring other gothic narratives that employ the same 'formula'. The usage of Pontianak as a symbol for the oppressive regimes of patriarchy ultimately narrates the enslavement of women as victims of patriarchal tyranny. In order to break free from oppression, the realm of horror is vital, as female characters with destructive capability and the ability for reckoning are only those who belong to the supernatural world of evil. Living women, meanwhile, are denied the privilege to challenge the tyranny under which they are oppressed.

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