Social Criticism through Ghost Storytelling on *Tirto.id* Podcast Contents

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the pattern of ghost storytelling in podcasts produced by *Tirto.id* journalists. It attempts to answer the question whether ghost storytelling on the *Tirto.id* podcast channel is a means of audience entertainment or whether it truly reflects the function that journalists play in educating the public and actualising societal criticism. Implementing a qualitative content analysis method, this study explores five ghost episodes on *Tirto.id*'s INSENTIF podcast channel. We argue that the selected podcast episodes exemplify the hybridity of journalism which amalgamates information with elements of fiction. We conclude that these podcast episodes on ghosts serve a deeper purpose than just telling stories about ghosts. They aim to entertain the audience while subtly engaging them in discussions surrounding social issues, such as patriarchy, parental love, relationships, and colonialism. This study supports Baym's idea to perceive journalism as orientation, rather than just as information.

Keywords: ghost storytelling; horror podcast; journalism hybridity; qualitative content analysis

Kritik Sosial melalui Kisah Hantu pada Konten Podcast Tirto.id

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi pola penyampaian cerita hantu dalam podcast yang diproduksi oleh jurnalis Tirto.id. *Penelitian ini berupaya menjawab pertanyaan apakah penceritaan hantu di saluran podcast* Tirto.id *merupakan sekadar sarana hiburan audiens atau sesungguhnya mencerminkan fungsi jurnalis dalam mengedukasi masyarakat dan mengaktualisasikan kritik sosial. Dengan menerapkan metode analisis isi kualitatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi lima episode hantu di saluran podcast INSENTIF yang diproduksi* Tirto.id. *Peneliti berargumen bahwa episode podcast yang diteliti merefleksikan hibriditas jurnalisme yang menggabungkan informasi dengan unsur fiksi. Peneliti menyimpulkan bahwa episode podcast hantu ini memiliki tujuan yang lebih dalam dari sekadar bercerita tentang hantu. Konten podcast ini bertujuan untuk menghibur penonton sekaligus secara halus melibatkan mereka dalam diskusi seputar isu-isu sosial, seperti patriarki, kasih sayang orang tua, hubungan, dan kolonialisme. Kajian ini mendukung gagasan Baym yang memandang jurnalisme sebagai orientasi, bukan hanya sebatas informasi.*

Kata-kata Kunci: jurnalisme hantu; podcast hantu; hibriditas jurnalisme; produksi podcast; analisis konten kualitatif

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INTRODUCTION

Reporting ghosts is against the journalism principle of providing verified information. Ghosts are things that are both empirically unobservable and unrelated to the public interest. Despite this, certain Indonesian news platforms produce stories on ghosts and supernatural cases, such as *Tirto.id* through its *INSENTIF* podcast channel, *Malam Jumat* section on *Mojok*'s news website, and *Kumparan* through its exclusive channel named *KumparanPLUS*. Our previous study on *Tirto.id*'s INSENTIF Podcast explains that when it comes to producing ghost stories, journalists are trying not only to entertain but also to educate the audience (Razali & Wirawan, 2022). In the case of *Tirto.id*'s INSENTIF Podcast channel, the journalists combine credible sources of information with fictional storylines, making their works become a hybrid form of fiction and information. Despite this, they still perceived their works as part of journalistic works—but with totally different approaches and standards.

The discussion of ghosts in media studies is majorly focused on entertainment media, like films and TV shows (Ayun, 2015; Downes, 2014; Herawati, 2011; Ismail & Wenerda, 2021; Karunianingsih, 2016; Larasati & Wahid, 2020; Lasty, 2020; Muthmainnah & Syas, 2020; Noer, 2021; Pangastuti, 2019; Permatasari & Widisanti, 2019; Wahid & Agustina, 2021; Windiasih et al., 2013). Moreover, the majority of these studies focus on the ways that sensuality and women's bodies are commodified in Indonesian horror films (Annissa & Adiprasetio, 2022; Ayun, 2015;

Herawati, 2011; Karunianingsih, 2016; Larasati & Wahid, 2020; Pangastuti, 2019; Windiasih et al., 2013). In the case of *Terowongan Casablanca, Tali Pocong Perawan,* and *Air Terjun Pengantin,* for example, Larasati & Wahid (2020), in their qualitative textual analysis, discovered that women's bodies are commodified through their clothing that reveals their attractive bodies, their gestures that reflect their seductive lust, and scenes that express sexual desires. These results are consistent with a research by Karunianingsih (2016) on the Indonesian horror film Pacar Hantu Perawan. She came to the conclusion that women's bodies were exploited by filmmakers to emphasise the male gaze through the use of cinematic techniques, like lighting and shot composition.

Our previous study (Razali & Wirawan, 2022) is an effort to demonstrate how journalistic media are involved in the production of ghost stories. It concludes that the emergence of ghost and horror content in *Tirto.id*'s platform is triggered by the structure of Indonesian society which (1) majorly believes in supernatural phenomena and (2) maintains a high preference for consuming horror-related media content. The data from Spotify's Head Studio for Southeast Asia supported our argument. Aside from comedy, horror-related topics are reported to be the most preferred genre in Indonesia (Zhafira, 2021).

Implementing Giddens' structuration framework of the dualism of structure, our previous research concludes that *Tirto.id* journalists are more likely to uphold and reproduce the existing structure than to resist it. However, our previous

242

study focused more on how *Tirto.id* journalists perceive their role in producing ghost stories. The exploration of how their roles are reflected in their media content or works has not been deeply provided. Therefore, this current study aims to address the above gaps and propose a deeper analysis of the content of *Tirto.id*'s horror podcast episodes.

While the horror genre has become very popular in Indonesia, the crime genre is the fourth favourite in the U.S. (Edison Research, 2022). One of the most phenomenal crime podcast series in the U.S. is *Serial*, which gained millions of downloads and received some prestigious journalism awards (Boling, 2019). In response to this trend, some podcasters in the U.S. are triggered to produce podcasts on crime genres. In her qualitative study of the production of true-crime podcasts, Boling (2019) explains that podcasts are perceived not only as entertainment content but also further as journalistic works that advocate justice. Furthermore, Boling (2019) argued that podcasts have an intriguing potential to give victims and inmates a voice as they lead the listeners through the criminal narrative, providing a unique degree of familiarity with the case and the parties involved. Based on her analysis, true-crime podcasters are interested in more than just telling a story; they are also involved in maintaining an active community that allows listeners to join in the discourse. Her study implies that when journalists follow the market demand and trend in producing their works, they still uphold their responsibility to the public by

involving them in the discussion and giving voice to the voiceless.

Feldman (2007) investigated the possibility of comedy as the source of news. His study was triggered by the data suggesting that American adolescents tend to abandon traditional news media. When it comes to learning about election campaigns, American adolescents prefer watching *The Daily Show*, a late-night comedy programme on TV, that frequently parodies actual news events. He investigated whether and how journalists remain relevant in light of American adolescents' rising disenchantment towards traditional forms of news. Feldman (2007) concluded that *The Daily Show* has encouraged journalists to reassess the once-strict line between news and entertainment.

Hybridity of Journalism

Baym (2016) defined hybridity as a merger of what was previously recognised as separate through institutional practices and cultural logic. In other words, hybridization is a dedifferentiating process that results in an absence of distinction between news and narratives, information and fiction, as well as information and entertainment. According to Baym, the practice of hybridity in journalism employs the imaginative potential and emotive force of fiction to actualise journalistic function, such as the commitment to the public interest, the role of an observational eye, and dedication to accurate representation in constructing information. He argues that the failure of journalism to connect the *systemworld*, such as

politics and law, to the daily realities of the *lifeworld* led to the emergence of hybridity.

Baym evaluated three selected narrative public affairs dramas to illustrate how to form a successful connection between *systemworld* and *lifeworld*. He analysed *Borgen*, a serial drama that follows the professional and personal lives of a fictional first female Prime Minister of Denmark. The drama blends current political issues with narrative fiction, delving into the intersection of politics and the personal lives of those entangled within it. *Borgen* is appreciated for its insightful portrayal of governance and parliamentary politics, as well as its nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by the main characters. The second analysis is based on *The Bridge*, a crime drama that uses a fictional serial killer case to explore the cultural and political tensions that exist along the US-Mexico border. The third public affairs narrative that Baym analysed is HBO's *The Wire*. The American urban underclass is the subject of this drama, which also explores the connections between poverty, education, violence, and local government.

By evaluating those three dramas, Baym comes to the conclusion that these dramas maintain an ability to connect *systemworld* and *lifeworld* through performing rather than by just informing. These dramas construct a comprehensive social world inhabited by profoundly developed fictional characters who confront social, political, and economic problems. According to Baym (2016), the hybridity of journalism and fiction encourages the audience to imagine themselves as living in the world they see on the screen and to realise that this

world and their experiences are frequently similar. This is in contrast to traditional news, which speaks to an audience and expects them to know. According to Baym, hybridity questions firmly established conceptions of what journalism is, how it should be practised, and who is authorised to do it. To define journalism, we can no longer rely on traditional indicators such as institution, genre, or voice. Instead, Baym suggests that we must focus on the work that journalism does or achieves. The recognition of "journalism as orientation" in addition to "journalism as information" is required for the hybridization of news.

While realising that hybridity has emerged as a characteristic of contemporary broadcast news, Baym (2016) asserted that hybridity has not been sufficiently explored in journalism studies. Therefore, this study fills that gap by delving deeper into *Tirto.id*'s horror podcast episodes, offering a uniquely Indonesian perspective on journalistic hybridity. Unlike Baym's (2016) study which concentrates on American television media, this recent study will pay attention to the emerging podcast channel and address how journalists' responsibility is reflected in the horror podcast episodes as well as how the hybridity of journalism is actualised through their works.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative content analysis (QCA) method, implementing approaches introduced by Schreier (2012). Compared to quantitative content analysis, Schreier (2012) mentioned that QNA provides greater flexibility.

244

According to Chappuis (2019), the QCA goes beyond quantifying the manifest elements of texts and explores the latent meaning reflected within the texts. While findings from the quantitative content analysis can be generalised to a larger context, the conclusions of the qualitative content analysis can only be applied to a particular context. Moreover, QCA is distinguished from quantitative content analysis regarding the strategy used in developing the coding frame. Schreier (2012) explained that quantitative content analysis applies a concept-driven deductive strategy in building the coding frame and strives to examine hypotheses. It is therefore uncommon in qualitative research, which is more exploratory and descriptive. In QCA, the coding frame is typically constructed by using a data-driven inductive strategy, although Schreier (2012) also addressed the idea of combining concept-driven and data-driven strategies.

This research will concentrate on PERSAMI (*Perkemahan Selasa Misteri*, or Mystery Tuesday Camp), a special segment in *Tirto.id*'s podcast channel. PERSAMI covers content about Indonesian ghost mythology, crime, sadistic history, unsolved mystery, murder, and conspiracy. Despite its wide range of theme coverage, this study limits the analysis on episodes that depict Indonesian ghost mythology. Out of 118 episodes on *Tirto: Insentif* podcast channel on YouTube, we identified only 9 episodes talking about Indonesian ghost mythology. We selected five episodes to be the unit of analysis. The selected episodes are (1) *Teror Wewe Gombel dan Nihil Cinta Orangtua* (The Terror of Wewe Gombel and

the Absence of Parental Love); (2) *Mitologi Tuyul: Si Botak yang Lahir dari Kesenjangan Sosial* (The Mythology of Tuyul: The Bald Figure Who Was Born from Social Inequality); (3) *Horor Kuntilanak: Korban Patriarki yang Membalas Dendam* (The Horror of Kuntilanak: The Revenge of Patriarchal Victim); (4) *Hantu Pastor Kepala Buntung* (The Ghost of Headless Priest); and (5) *Legenda Mak Lampir: Teror Putri Champa yang Patah Hati* (The Legend of Mak Lampir: The Terror of Heart-broken Champa Princess). Each episode was transcribed and analysed through two stages of analysis: open coding and axial coding. In the phase of open coding, the researchers read and code the themes that emerge from the transcript. In the phase of axial coding, the researchers review the themes that emerged through open coding and classify similar themes into a new general category.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tirto.id is recognised for its in-depth reporting style backed by visually-appealing infographics and illustrations. This online media differs from the majority of Indonesian media which is characterised by sensationalism, immediacy, and a short-form reporting style (Ciptadi & Armando, 2018). When podcasts became popular among Indonesian young adults in 2020, *Tirto.id* launched a podcast channel called *Podcast Tirto: INSENTIF*. According to our earlier study (Razali & Wirawan, 2023), the *INSENTIF* podcast was established in an attempt to stay up with the increasing trends of producing and consuming podcasts. It also aims to extend

245

Tirto.id's existence in the form of audio, after previously existing in the form of articles, infographics, and videos.

The *INSENTIF* podcast channel maintains a particular segment named PERSAMI (*Perkemahan Selasa Misteri* or Mystery Tuesday Camp). This segment consists of stories related to ghosts, Indonesian local mythology, crime, sadistic history, unsolved mysteries, and other horror-themed topics. After listening, transcribing, and analysing the five selected episodes of PERSAMI, we capture several interesting themes which are further elaborated as follows.

Creating the Theatre of the Mind. Out of the five episodes we analysed, four are monologues and one is a dialogue. Each episode that appears as a monologue consists of two main sections. The first section typically commences with a fictional story. In this section, the podcaster acts as the central character and guides the audience through a narrative delivered with immersive storytelling techniques. The second section of these monologue episodes takes a distinct turn, transitioning from the storytelling mode to an informative and analytical one. In this second section, the podcaster shifts from being a character in the story to serving as a knowledgeable guide, offering explanations, insights, and interpretations related to the narrative.

The use of detailed descriptions in these monologue episodes is akin to the tradition found in fairy tales and classic literature. By meticulously crafting the settings and characters through detailed descriptions, the INSENTIF podcast not only engages the audience's imagination but also creates a sensory and emotional connection with the narratives. The use of detailed descriptive words to build the setting of the story can be found, for instance, in the episode of "The Mythology of Tuyul: The Bald Figure Who Was Born from Social Inequality".

> *Istriku sendiri sudah tidur nyenyak di sampingku, di sebelah anak kami, di atas sebuah ranjang reyot warisan orang tuaku. Rumahku ini sebenarnya lebih pantas disebut dengan gubuk. … Malam itu aku tidak bisa tidur. Pertama karena lapar. Makan malam itu hanya cukup untuk istriku karena sejak kemarin aku tidak kunjung dapat kerjaan.* (My wife was sleeping comfortably next to me, close to our child, on a *rickety bed* passed down from my parents. My house was actually *more appropriate to be called a shack* … I couldn't sleep that night. First, because I was *hungry.* The dinner was only for my wife because *I had no job for days.*) (*Mitologi Tuyul: Si Botak yang Lahir dari Kesenjangan Sosial*)

The setting described above is fundamental to amplify that the main character lived in poverty. This background is necessary to develop a storyline and strengthen the idea that the mythology of *Tuyul* arose from the issue of social inequality. Another example of how the podcaster uses detailed descriptive words is portrayed in the episode of "The Terror of Wewe Gombel and the Absence of Parental Love". In the orientation phase, the narrator mentioned the following.

> *Malam ini memang agak berbeda dari biasanya. Semuanya diawali dari Bu Pur yang tiba-tiba datang ke rumah Pak RT lalu melapor kalau Dimas, anaknya yang berusia lima tahun, belum pulang sejak magrib. Waktu itu Bu Pur kelihatan panik banget, nafas yang ngos-ngosan, ia pun mengaku udah cari di Dimas ke rumah-rumah tetangga, tempat Dimas biasa*

246

main, tapi Dimas gak ketemu. ... (Tonight was a bit different than usual. It all started with Mrs Pur who suddenly came to the house of Mr Head of Neighbourhood and reported that Dimas, her five-year-old son, had not come home since sunset. At that time, Mrs Pur looked really panicked and out of breath. She also admitted that she had searched for Dimas at neighbouring houses, where Dimas used to play, but she could not find him. ...) (*Teror Wewe Gombel dan Nihil Cinta Orangtua*)

The setting of a woman losing her child is crucial as an introductory part of the episode. This is due to the fact that the episode talks about the origin of Wewe Gombel, the figure that is associated with the child-kidnapping ghost. Therefore, the heart-wrenching circumstances surrounding the child's disappearance at the beginning of the story provide context about what kind of harm this ghost can cause to society. The initial incident sets the stage for the subsequent events in the narrative, where the villagers unite in an attempt to locate the missing child. This collective effort highlights the sense of community and solidarity of local Indonesian society.

In the episode of "The Legend of Mak Lampir: The Terror of Heart-broken Champa Princess", the story begins with the recount of a young man who was in a conflict with his girlfriend. His involvement in a conversation with another woman led to a deep sense of disappointment and anger inside the heart of his girlfriend. He then decided to calm his mind down in his favourite place, Mount Merapi.

Aku baru aja berantem sama pacar. Salahku juga sih hehe. Aku ke-gap chattingan sama mantan. Hehe hampir aja pecah tuh perang dunia ketiga. Udah gitu, orang tuaku ngejar-ngejar tuh skripsi kapan kelar, kapan lulus. Heh… jadi ya malam itu aku memilih Merapi, tempat favoritku buat menenangkan pikiran. (I just got into an argument with my girlfriend. It was my fault anyway hehe. I got caught chatting with my ex. The third world war almost broke out. Furthermore, my parents were chasing me about when to finish my thesis, and when to graduate. Huh… so that night, I chose Merapi, my favorite place to calm my mind.) (*Legenda Mak Lampir: Teror Putri Champa yang Patah Hati*)

This opening narrative provides context to recount the mythology of Mak Lampir. It is told that Mak Lampir was a princess who fell in love with a man but her love was not returned. Therefore, the story of a man who experienced conflict with his girlfriend is a good bridge to the background of Mak Lampir which will be explained later in the second section of this episode. According to our interpretation, the relatability of everyday struggles, such as arguing with loved ones, will draw listeners in and create a connection with the characters and stories in this podcast episode.

In addition to depicting the place, time, and environment setting of the story, detailed description is also applied to illustrate the physical appearance of the ghost. These detailed descriptions not only serve to evoke the image of the ghost but also contribute to the frightening and mysterious atmosphere of the story, intensifying the listener's sense of fear and suspense. The table below captured several examples of how the narrator describes the ghosts.

Table 1. The descriptions of the ghosts.

Original Transcript (Indonesian)	Translation (English)	Episode Title
Aku melihat sosok paling ganjil dan paling menakutkan dalam hidupku. Seorang nenek-nenek yang tingginya melampaui tubuh manusia normal. Mungkin dua meter lebih. Ia telanjang bulat dan begitu aku bisa melihat tubuhnya secara langsung… kulit yang keriput dan berbulu, rambut, tangan dan kukunya yang serba panjang. Aku sama sekali gak berani menatap mukanya. Ada dua bola mata yang berwarna merah yang menyala dalam gelap. Payudaranya besar dan amat menjuntai.	I saw the strangest and most terrifying creature in my life: an old woman who was taller than an average person. She might be two meters tall or more. She was completely naked so I could see her wrinkled and shaggy body with the hair, hands, and nails all along. I didn't dare to look at her face. There were two red eyes that glowed in the dark. Her breasts are gigantic and dangling	*Teror Wewe Gombel dan Nihil Cinta Orangtua*
Tiba-tiba dari balik pohon beringin, muncul seorang anak kecil. Anak kecil yang bertelanjang bulat. Oh ternyata tidak. Dia hanya memakai celana dalam. Perawakannya kurus, usianya mungkin sekitar lima tahun. Kulitnya putih pucat dan kepalanya botak.	Suddenly from behind the banyan tree, a little kid appeared. A completely naked little boy. Oh, apparently not. He only wore underwear. He was thin, probably about five years old. His skin was pale white and his head was bald.	*Mitologi Tuyul: Si Botak yang Lahir dari Kesenjangan Sosial*
Seorang nenek yang memakai jubah serba hitam, menggenggam tongkat panjang, dan berambut yang warna abu-abu muda. Mukanya keriput, hijau, dan	An old woman in a black robe, holding a long cane, and with light grey hair. Her face was wrinkled and green. There were many scars	*Legenda Mak Lampir: Teror Putri Champa yang Patah Hati*
ada banyak bekas luka di wajahnya. Ya, Tuhan! Matanya merah menyala menyorot tajam ke arahku [suara tawa Mak Lampir] Aku sampai jatuh saking kagetnya. …	on her face. Oh my god! Her bright red eyes glared at me [sound of Mak Lampir's laughter] I fell because I was really frightened.	
Seorang pastor tanpa kepala, kepalanya tergenggam di tangan kirinya sendiri. Gila! Sungguh pemandangan paling horor yang pernah ada di depan mataku! Makin horor lagi ada seekor anjing berwarna hitam yang berdiri di sampingnya, matanya merah, menyala dalam gelap, …	A headless priest, with his head held in his own left hand. Crazy! What a terrifying sight I've ever seen before my eyes! Moreover, there was a black dog standing next to him, his eyes were red, glowing in the dark, …	*Hantu Pastor Kepala Buntung*

A different pattern of how the narrator describes the physical appearance of a ghost is captured in the episode of "The Horror of Kuntilanak: The Revenge of Patriarchal Victim". Because this episode is presented in dialogue with conversational concepts—just like a radio show—the way the narrators describe the ghost is slightly different. They make use of some jokes to describe *Kuntilanak*, the most iconic long-haired female ghost in Indonesia.

Table 2. The descriptions of the ghosts.

Original Transcript (Indonesian)	Translation (English)	Episode Title
[perempuan] : Bener juga sih! Kalo ngomongin Kuntilanak, pasti yang kebayang	[woman]: That's right! Talking about Kuntilanak	*Horor Kuntilanak: Korban Patriarki*

Suzanna, rambutnya panjang, matanya melotot. [laki-laki] : *Rambutnya panjang, matanya melotot ...* [perempuan]: *Itu Keong Racun.* [laki-laki] :*Hhahahaha.* [perempuan] :*Sekeliling matanya item kaya kebanyakan pakai eyeshadow gitu.* [laki-laki] : *Hahahahaha.* [perempuan] : *Sama bajunya, bajunya pasti terusan warna putih. Aku inget banget tuh adegan dia duduk di pohon terus terbang sambil tertawa "hihihihi".*	makes me remember the actress Suzzana with her long hair and bulging eyes. [man]: Long hair and bulging eyes… (joking) [woman]: That's (the lyrics of) Keong Racun! [man]: Hahaha (laughing) [woman]: Her eyes are dark around the corners as if she had a lot of eyeshadows. [man]: Hahahaha (laughing) [woman]: And about her gown, it must be a long white gown. I remember clearly the scene when she sat on the branch of a tree and then flew away while laughing "hihihihi"	*yang Membalas Dendam*

Some efforts are also made in order to build an imaginary setting, such as the use of supporting sound effects and dramatic storytelling voice. We perceive this phase as an attempt to create the "theatre of the mind" in the audience's imagination via audio. Through the use of sound effects, which can range from subtle background ambience to striking, attention-grabbing sounds, podcasters can transport listeners to distant landscapes, such as in the middle of a forest, at the top of a hill, at a cemetery, and so on. These sound effects serve as the building blocks of the mental scenery, allowing the audience to imagine hearing the terrifying laughter of the ghost, the hasty breath of the main character, and the horrible midnight atmosphere without ever seeing them. Furthermore, the use of a dramatic storytelling voice plays a pivotal role. A skilled narrator employs vocal inflexions, pacing, and emotion to breathe life into characters and plots. This vocal technique encourages the audience to not only visualise the scenes but also empathise with the characters' emotions, adding depth and authenticity to the "theatre of the mind".

Discussing Social Issues through Ghosts. This section will delve deeper into the analysis of how *Tirto.id* journalists transcend their ghostly tales to foster a broader and more meaningful conversation. In the episode "The Terror of Wewe Gombel and the Absence of Parental Love", the podcaster elaborated her interpretation by highlighting the background of Wewe Gombel, the wife of a man who resided in Gombel Hill, Semarang, Central Java. Her harmonic marriage did not last long. In the second year of her marriage, her nice husband turned abusive because of her inability to give him a kid. The husband then married another woman and it sparked massive disappointment and indignation inside her heart. She had the impression that she was being treated like property, to be disposed of when no longer needed. One night, the wife killed her husband by slitting his neck while he was sleeping next to his

249

new wife. She used the same knife to stab her own stomach as she ran away towards the top of Gombel Hill. Through reflecting on this background, the podcaster criticises the structure of Indonesian society, which blames women when a married couple is unable to have children.

> *Tentu saja ada banyak kemungkinan mengapa sang istri tak kunjung hamil. Bisa saja sang suami yang mandul, tapi sang suami seakan tidak mempedulikan kemungkinan itu karena ia merasa malu harga dirinya sebagai seorang laki-laki akan tercoreng jika orang-orang tahu bahwa dirinya mandul.* (Of course, there are many possibilities as to why the wife was not getting pregnant. It could be that the husband was infertile, but the husband did not seem to care about that possibility because he felt ashamed that his pride as a man would be damaged if people found out that he was infertile.) (*Teror Wewe Gombel dan Nihil Cinta Orangtua*)

The interpretation then moves to the superstition that Wewe Gombel abducts kids for at least two different reasons. First, Wewe Gombel passed away without having children. In other words, Wewe Gombel kidnaps the things she was never able to own while she was living. This highlights the idea that unfulfilled desires can manifest in malevolent actions. Second, it is believed that Wewe Gombel exclusively abducts kids who lack parental love, often victims of abusive marriages. This raises concerns about the impact of neglect and abuse on children's well-being.

> *Bisa karena ayahnya pemabuk, tukang judi, tidak bisa memenuhi kebutuhan keluarga, lalu kabur bersama perempuan lain. Atau bisa jadi si ibu adalah tipikal selalu memarahi anak, hobinya melakukan kekerasan fisik maupun*

verbal, sehingga sang anak tidak pernah kerasan tinggal di rumah. Bagi sang anak rumah adalah neraka. Jika tak bercerai pun sepasang suami-istri bisa menjalani rumah tangga yang dingin, yang tidak dipenuhi rasa kasih sayang sehingga melahirkan relasi yang toksik bersama anak-anak mereka. Anak-anak ini akan tumbuh menjadi anak yang merasa tidak pernah dicintai, tidak diperhatikan, dan tidak dihargai. (It could be because the father was a drunkard, a gambler, unable to meet the family's needs, so the father ran away with another woman. Or it could be that the mother is a typical person who always scolds the child, and gives physical and verbal violence so that the child never feels living at home. For the child, home is hell. If the father and mother don't divorce, they might live in a frigid household, which is not filled with affection, giving birth to toxic relationships with their children. These children will grow up to feel like they are never loved, cared for, and unappreciated.) (*Teror Wewe Gombel dan Nihil Cinta Orangtua*)

We argue that this episode uses the narrative of Wewe Gombel to engage in the discussion of societal structure in Indonesia, which tends to blame women when a married couple is unable to conceive children. This reflects a deep-seated cultural issue where women are often held responsible for fertility problems within a marriage. This perspective unfairly burdens women and fails to consider that infertility can be caused by various factors, including male infertility or medical conditions that affect both partners. We perceive that this episode encourages listeners to reconsider their perspectives and promote more compassionate and supportive attitudes. The podcaster ended the episode by mentioning "*Kadang hal-hal yang berharga itu baru kita sadari menjadi sesuatu yang sangat berharga ketika kita sudah kehilangannya.* (Sometimes we

only realise that things mean a lot when we have lost them.)"

A similar theme is also captured in the episode of "The Horror of Kuntilanak: The Revenge of Patriarchal Victim". Although presented in a more convivial way, the dialogue between the two podcasters leads to criticism towards Indonesian society which is still strongly constructed through patriarchal values. The following dialogue excerpt illustrates how the indictment towards patriarchy is conveyed.

> Podcaster A: *Yang bikin si Kunti ini dulu menderita pokoknya, jadi korban perkosaan, eh malah dia jadi disalahin karena katanya dia goda-godain gitu.* (What made Kunti suffer was that she was a rape victim, but in fact, she received the blame because she was accused to tease men.)
>
> Podcaster B: *Victim blaming gitu, ya?* (A kind of victim blaming, isn't it?)
>
> Podcaster A: *Yoi, terus bukannya di-support secara mental, malah semakin dihujat karena dianggap aib oleh orang sekampung. Biasanya nih kalau pelakunya punya privilege juga kan gak bakalan diusut.* (Yeah, and instead of getting mental support, she got cursed by the people of her village because she was considered a shame in society. And usually, if the perpetrator has privileges, they won't be investigated.)
>
> *Podcaster B: Ya, jamak, sih! Itu dari dulu sampai sekarang kan berarti. Udah ilang kasusnya kalau sama musuh-musuh orang punya privilege itu tadi, buyar.* (Yes, typical! It's been going on for a long time. The case will definitely go uninvestigated if the enemies are people who have privileges.)

There are various versions of Kuntilanak's origin. One version mentions that Kuntilanak was a woman who got raped by a group of drunk men.

One of the rapists was the son of the village official. Because the perpetrator came from a privileged family, it made the case uninvestigated. The woman then got depressed because she was cursed by villagers and even her own family. As a result, she decided to end her life by leaping into a steep gorge. The other version recounted that Kuntilanak was a woman who was buried alive while she was pregnant. Her death had transformed her into a vengeful spirit and gave her more power to take revenge on the rapists.

The dialogue between the two podcasters mainly criticises the way society often blames women for being raped, rather than holding the perpetrators accountable. It raises awareness of victim-blaming culture and its harmful effects that are still going on nowadays. Women who become rape victims are often cursed and treated as a shame in society. The pain does not end there. When these victims decide to give birth to their child, society will stigmatise the child as an unwanted and illegitimate child. According to our interpretation, this episode challenges victim-blaming culture straightforwardly and promotes understanding and support for rape victims.

While the above two episodes engage in the issue of patriarchy, the episode "The Mythology of Tuyul: The Bald Figure Who Was Born from Social Inequality" focuses on the issue of poverty and social equality. By referring to Indonesian historian Ong Hok Ham, the podcaster notes that the mythology of Tuyul arose from the jealousy of the poor towards the rich. The podcaster elaborates that the jealousy began when the Dutch abandoned

251

the system of enforced planting and implemented liberal economic policies. As a result, business owners had more opportunities to enrich themselves, but farmers were in a different condition. Farmers were exploited more and more because intermediaries were able to control the agricultural market and set prices that were unfair to farmers. They were dealing with the practice of debt bondage, greedy landlords, and aggressive loan sharks. Not to mention that farmers also became victims of unfair tax implementation.

In the context of the limited logical mindset of the Indonesian local community at that time, the rapid accumulation of wealth is often seen as a sign of supernatural intervention, leading to accusations of spiritual collusion. Through this episode, we perceive that the podcaster indirectly addresses the issue of human greed. They point out that this pursuit of material wealth often came at a considerable cost, as individuals relentlessly sought more riches, even to the extent of sacrificing their close relationships and loved ones. This criticism serves as a commentary on the negative consequences of prioritising material gain above all else, highlighting how it can lead to the erosion of essential human bonds and values.

Konon Tuyul punya kemampuan tidak kasat mata dan juga kemampuan menembus dinding. Dia bisa memasuki tembok orang kaya, membuka brankasnya, dan membawa uang atau harta benda yang ada di dalamnya. Tapi, tentu saja tidak ada makan siang yang gratis. Untuk bisa memelihara Tuyul, seseorang harus menyiapkan tumbal dalam bentuk nyawa manusia. Bisa nyawa si pemilik Tuyul yang akan diambil setelah kontraknya habis atau bisa juga nyawa teman atau nyawa anggota keluarga. Versi lain mengatakan Tuyul bisa dikontrak selama tujuh tahun. Selama tujuh tahun itu, Tuyul bisa dimanfaatkan untuk mengeruk kekayaan sebanyak-banyaknya. (It is said that Tuyul has the ability to be invisible and also the ability to penetrate walls. He could enter a rich man's walls, open his safe, and take away the money or property contained within. But, of course, there is no such thing as a free lunch. To be able to maintain Tuyul, one must prepare a sacrifice in the form of a human life. It could be the life of the Tuyul owner which will be taken after the contract expires or it could be the life of a friend or the life of a family member. Another version says Tuyul can be contracted for seven years. During those seven years, Tuyul can be used to gain as much wealth as possible.) (*Mitologi Tuyul: Si Botak yang Lahir dari Kesenjangan Sosial*)

The podcaster concludes by noting that despite the increasing rationality and modernization of the Indonesian local community, the superstition surrounding Tuyul remains prevalent. The podcaster goes on to draw a connection between the enduring belief in Tuyul and the capitalist system. From her perspective, as long as economic inequality exists, the poor are likely to maintain feelings of jealousy and suspicion regarding how to acquire as much wealth as possible. This implies that the belief in Tuyul may continue because it offers a way for some individuals to rationalise or cope with the economic disparities they face. Tuyul, in this context, represents a kind of hope or belief that there are supernatural means to improve one's financial situation, even in the face of systemic inequality. We perceive that in this section, the podcaster makes use of the mythology of Tuyul to bring up the issue of social equality while at the same time criticizing the greedy characteristic of human

beings. This interpretation is based on the following part of the podcaster's script.

> *Zaman bergerak ke arah yang semakin maju, masyarakat Jawa makin rasional, tapi tentu saja di era kekinian pun masih ada yang percaya mitos Tuyul. Barangkali karena ini buka soal kemajuan zaman, tapi soal ketimpangan ekonomi. Selama ketimpangan ini masih ada, atau bahkan makin melebar, orang-orang miskin akan terus bertanya-tanya bagaimana bisa menjadi kaya dalam waktu yang singkat dan melalui usaha yang tak seberapa. Barangkali Tuyul memang benar-benar ada tapi nama aslinya adalah privilege atau kadang dipanggil kapitalisme.* (Times are moving in an increasingly advanced direction, and Javanese society is becoming more rational, but of course, even in the current era there are still those who believe in the Tuyul myth. Perhaps because this is not about modernization, but about economic inequality. As long as this inequality persists, or even widens, poor people will continue to wonder how they can become rich in a short time and through little effort. Maybe Tuyul really exists but its real name is privilege or sometimes called capitalism.) (*Mitologi Tuyul: Si Botak yang Lahir dari Kesenjangan Sosial*)

The issue of colonialism is portrayed in the episode of "The Ghost of Headless Priest". This episode strives to capture the other side of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. While Dutches were identified as invaders, the podcaster mentions that there were some Dutches who did not agree to support colonialism, such as a Dutch priest who lived and served in Indonesia. However, because of the increasing political tension at that time, the relationship between the Indonesian community and the Dutch was deteriorating rapidly. The sentiment of hatred towards Dutches became uncontrollable.

> *Katanya Hantu Pastor Kepala Buntung sebenarnya sudah ada sejak zaman kolonial Belanda, lebih tepatnya di masa Indonesia hampir merebut kemerdekaan. Ini masa di mana pergerakan nasional menjamur di berbagai daerah. Situasi ini otomatis meningkatkan tensi hubungan antar warga pribumi dan orang-orang Belanda yang tinggal di Indonesia.* (It is said that the ghost of Headless Priest had actually existed since the Dutch colonial era, more precisely when Indonesia was on the verge of independence. This was a time when national movements expanded massively in various regions. This situation automatically heightened tensions between native citizens and Dutch residents in Indonesia.) (*Hantu Pastor Kepala Buntung*)

In this hostile environment, a Dutch priest living among the local people became a target. The priest was killed and his body was mutilated. As a result of this horrifying event, it is believed that his spirit was left in a state of unrest and continued to haunt the area accompanied by his dog. We perceive that this episode serves as an illustration of the tragic consequences of colonialism, as it not only affected the colonised but also had a profound impact on the lives of individual Dutch citizens who lived in the colony. According to our opinion, this episode strives to involve the audience in the discussion on the complex interplay of historical events, political tensions, and cultural beliefs in shaping the narrative of The Headless Priest.

The last episode that we analyse is "The Legend of Mak Lampir: The Terror of Heart-broken Champa Princess". This episode delves into the issue of relationships. The podcaster initiates her interpretation by recounting a brief background of Mak Lampir. It is believed that Mas Lampir was once a stunning princess who acquired witchcraft

knowledge in the mystical Mount Merapi. She used her magical power to resurrect the man she deeply loved. However, this action came at a significant cost: the sacrifice of her own beauty. Her face turned wrinkled as the man came back to life. She thought the man would appreciate her sacrifice with love and gratitude, but it turned out that the man was frightened and unable to accept the transformation of her appearance.

> *Ada satu ilmu yang Nenek Srintil wariskan kepada Maimunah sebelum Sang Guru meninggal. Ilmu membangkitkan orang mati. Maimunah sadar akan konsekuensinya. Paras cantiknya akan berubah menjadi buruk rupa dan tak lagi muda. Di tengah kebimbangan itu, Maimunah akhirnya memilih cinta.* (There is a knowledge that Grandma Srintil passed on to Maimunah before the Master died. The science of raising the dead. Maimunah was aware of the consequences. Her beautiful face will turn ugly and she will no longer be young. In the midst of this doubt, Maimunah finally chose love.) (*Legenda Mak Lampir: Teror Putri Champa yang Patah Hati*)

According to our interpretation, this episode underscores the complexities of love and the profound sacrifices that individuals are willing to make for someone they love in the hope of being loved back. When the podcaster labels Mak Lampir as "a terror for people who only judge someone by their physical appearance", it brings to the forefront a significant social issue. This statement addresses the prevailing problem in society where individuals often place excessive emphasis on external beauty when forming their judgments about others. In such cases, they tend to underestimate individuals based solely on their physical looks. The episode, in a way, challenges this aspect of human behaviour.

The following script of the episode forms the basis for our interpretation,

> *Maimunah akhirnya berubah menjadi sosok Mak Lampir sepenuhnya, meneror siapapun yang mengoloknya, mengganggu siapapun yang tidak punya rasa cinta yang sejati, dan menjadi teror bagi orang-orang yang hanya menilai seseorang dari tampilan fisiknya.* (Maimunah finally turned into a complete Mak Lampir figure, terrorising anyone who makes fun of her, annoying anyone who doesn't have true love, and becoming a terror for people who only judge someone by their physical appearance.) (*Legenda Mak Lampir: Teror Putri Champa yang Patah Hati*)

By analysing the five selected podcast episodes, we argue that *Tirto.id*'s journalists make use of Indonesian ghost mythology to bring up social issues related to the background of the ghost they recount. We perceive that the episodes serve a deeper purpose than just telling stories about ghosts. They aim to entertain the audience while subtly engaging them in discussions surrounding social issues, such as patriarchy, parental love, relationships, colonialism, and so on. We argue that even though *Tirto.id*'s podcast episodes on ghost utilise fiction and recount narratives, to some extent they still actualise the role of journalism as social observational eyes. Journalists may contribute to enlighten the public and encourage good change by giving a critical perspective on social concerns.

Therefore, this finding illustrates the hybridity of journalism as elaborated by Baym (2016). Hybridity in Baym's interpretation is an integration of what was previously recognised as separate, such as news and narratives or

information and fiction, into a single form of media content. According to Baym, the practice of journalism hybridity actualises journalistic functions, such as the commitment to the public interest and the role of an observational eye, by utilising the imaginative potential and emotive force of fiction. For instance, in his analysis on HBO's *The Wire*, Baym captured that this drama explores the American urban underclass and its relationship with poverty, education, violence, and local government. Furthermore, Baym's analysis on *The Bridge*, a crime drama that uses a fictional serial killer case, illustrates how it is utilised to discuss cultural and political issues along the US-Mexico border.

Baym (2016) also observes that certain comedy programmes on television have evolved into a source of serious news that provides audiences with new opportunities for engaging with politics and current affairs. This possibility has been previously captured in Feldman's (2007) study on how journalists might remain relevant in the face of American teens' growing disappointment with traditional news sources. He argues that when it comes to learning about political issues, American adolescents prefer watching *The Daily Show*, a late-night comedy programme on TV, that parodies actual news events. He concludes that *The Daily Show* has encouraged journalists to reassess the once-strict line between news and entertainment.

Our finding strengthens Boiling's (2019) argument which highlights that podcasts produced by journalists are way beyond telling stories; they could be used to give voice to the voiceless, advocate justice, and stimulate awareness towards particular issues. In this case, *Tirto.id*'s podcast episodes have sparked awareness towards social issues, such as patriarchy, parental love, relationships, and colonialism through the use of imaginative potential and emotive force of Indonesian ghost storytelling. Referring to Baym's (2016) terminology of *systemworld* and *lifeworld*, we perceive that *Tirto.id*'s horror podcast episodes are produced as an attempt to connect the *systemworld* and the *lifeworld* through performing rather than by just informing. *Tirto.id*'s podcast episodes on ghosts encourage the audience to put themselves in the shoes of the main character and to realise how often the experiences they have and the story itself are similar. This is in contrast to traditional journalism, which speaks to the audience and expects them to understand. According to Baym, to define journalism, we can no longer rely on traditional indicators such as institution, genre, or voice. Instead, Baym suggests that we must focus on the work that journalism does or achieves.

CONCLUSION

Ghost storytelling in *Tirto.id*'s INSENTIF channel exemplifies the hybridity of journalism which amalgamates information with elements of fiction. Each monologue-style episode is structured into two distinct sections. The first section commences with ghost narratives, while the second section provides explanations, insights, and interpretations. In building the story settings and

255

characters in the first section, the podcasters use rich and detailed descriptive phrases, dramatic voices, as well as supporting sound effects to create the "theatre of the mind". It encourages the audience not only to visualise the scenes in their mind but also to imagine themselves immersed in the scenes. We conclude that horrific scenes experienced by fictional characters in the first section serve as a bridge that leads the audience deeper into the central issues to be further elaborated upon in the second section.

Transitioning from the storytelling mode to an informative and analytical one, a different podcaster in the second section strives to provide a background of the ghost that is based on historians, books, newspapers, and other sources of information. The podcaster then connects this background with contemporary social issues in Indonesia, such as patriarchy, victim-blaming culture, parental love, relationships, horizontal conflicts, and so on. This study argues that even though the platform and the approaches are slightly different, these podcast episodes on ghosts still actualise the journalistic goals. It criticises imbalances and brings these problems to the forefront of audience awareness. This study supports Baym's (2016) idea to perceive journalism as orientation, rather than just as information. This study contributes to enriching the discussion of journalistic hybridity by having a look at the practice from Indonesia.

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257