

Identity and Gender Perspective of Gatotkaca through Transmedia Narrative in Character Design for Game

Case Study of Ghatotkacha Character Design in Boma Naraka Sura PC Game

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Abstract—Indonesian games are still need improvement, this matter is indicated by the quantity and the quality of the product. One of the quality game aspect is character design which has big influence in visual assets development. The contemporary spirit to develop creativity in cultural aspect through many media has opened many possibilities to breakfree from the traditional form in Indonesia, especially wayang, that commonly considered as sacred which has made the audiences lost their interest. This research was made to study the game character design of Ghatotkacha in Boma Naraka Sura PC Game by Anantarupa Studio which is using cultural story of wayang. This game had significant support in crowdfunding. In descriptive interpretive analysis from cultural identity and gender stereotyping perspective through transmedia narrative, Gatotkaca character design has evolved from narrative into visual form that is being marked by eminent artworks.

Keywords— *character design; gatotkaca; gender perspective; Indonesian game; cultural design.*

I. INTRODUCTION

We can download mobile game easily and freely in playstore or App store based on operating system that we used. Besides that, many websites from game developer also distribute their work independently. Crowdfunding project that turns creativity and awesomeness into real project is one of the method that small game studios do. Crowdfunding game projects have gained potential financial commitment from gamers or others as investors. Compared with foreign developers, Indonesian game developers are lacked in number, besides that, the main problem is that gamers have bad perception in local game that have poor quality if it compared with others. A stereotype causing COO (Country of Origin) effect, according to Michael R.Solomon, COO is a determinant attribute in the decision-making process. Consumers strongly associate certain items with specific countries, and products from those countries often attempt to benefit from these linkages [1]. Clearly that the perception of quality will be associated with that certain country, a study from Annisa Desiani and Heny Hendrayati has concluded that Indonesian consumers have lack interest in local game based on COO. This perception shows us Indonesian game industry that needs more support.

Many onlines articles show us some good reviews on local games despite the bad perception from the gamers. Not only in

the story and gameplay aspects, but they received good reviews in their unique visual design. One of the example is KuruSetra mobile game created by Qajoo studio, that used cultural elements design in their characters as visual assets. The Wayang forms in KuruSetra game are dominant, and by looking from the basic shape of the character, we can see the silhouette and the details of the character attributes that construct the overall image in their character. Another game example is “A Space for the Unbound” created by Mojiken Studio, the local aspects are shown in the storyline and slice of life of the high school student characters. The “Indonesian identity” issues brought to the game is caused by nationalism from the developers, that indirectly gives characteristic and uniqueness to the game as a cultural symbol. This cultural symbol is embedded in character designs that contributes a certain cultural recognition value.

The visual concept development in local game, especially in character design which concerns in the three dimensional character as presented by Lajos Egri [2], including physiological, sociological and psychological aspects connected with body posture, attributes and clothes, even the weapon, will show us the character personality, behaviour, expertise and role. Psychologically, character will develop its goals, ambitions, and even the emotional temperament. The sociology aspect includes the character classes, occupation in the game, race, and nationality. The basic of physiological concerns about the character sex, age, height and weight, visual aspects like color of the hair, eyes, skin, and mostly how physique condition will be developed. The depth of conceptual and visual development and also uniqueness character design for local games become requirement for the game developers to consider. Design approaches and strategy to develop local game character design can be more flexible based on characteristic needs, especially on how character design is used for global identity representation without losing its local aspects.

In local game character design development, there is idealism in the process and results that we can see in some published local games. The designs have become phenomenon of ideology which give representation of meaning in individually cultural system or society, such as the explanation thesis from Althusser [3], it gives semantics production explicitly as denotation or implicitly as connotation. The

phenomenon of digital technology that has made games into popular form of entertainment, is caused by the aspect of interactivity and engaging involvement from the user with the game media and gives cultural influence from certain country that brought as media content. For example, Japanese popular culture has a stronger effect on user perceptions and emotion. Reckon on how manga style affects the visual style of most character design in local game, by combining multicultural and cross cultural into the form of character design and game design are lateral way on how the concept will be developed harmoniously. By doing lateral thinking in that development, gives free alternative in other dimensional of creativity, or using combination between lateral and linear for problem solving as mentioned by De Bono [4] as design strategy.

One of Indonesian game that is still under development is Boma Naraka Sura PC game (will be referred as Boma game) created by Anantarupa Studio. The strategy is activated in kickstarter as a crowdfunding project, where the fan base can give ideas about development process as comments. It presents the background of wayang and has a theme based on Indonesian folklore. The storyline and production in visual assets are using cross cultural method. We can see clearly that manga style is merged with Indonesian element design in their visual design, especially in playable character "Sveta", and also other non playable character. Cultural elements are not always visually embedded in their visual assets. Therefore, the combination of cultures that Anantarupa did in Boma game could be studied with certain method as an example of appropriate approach for local game design to reach global audience.

Interestingly, one of the Boma game NPC is "Ghatokkacha", as one of the villains in the game. The character of Gatotkaca is commonly known by Indonesian perspective as a hero, opposites with the Boma game storytelling. The phenomenon of the Boma game is all wayang-inspired characters are female in that game, including "Ghatokkacha", however all published Gatotkaca magnum opus in Indonesia visualized it as male. The contradictory of Gatotkaca's sex between what Indonesian have known and "Ghatokkacha" in Boma game indicate that Anantarupa as the developer has certain goal that interest the author about gender role. Instead of sex changing, the visualization as an identity of Gatotkaca has been deformed into new visual form. Considering that sex changing characters that inspired by wayang in Boma game, where wayang has strong relation with Javanese, Sundanese and Balinese culture, which patriarchy lives in those cultural aspect, creating assumption about gender role issue. Since 11 centuries ago, wayang (i.e. wayang purwa) as media has been part of cultural hegemony, including the way of life in those ethnic groups that affects the gender hierarchy by placing women in second class paradigm. This cultural perspective has impact in daily life, restraining social interaction, sexist and hegemony in gender role.

Through media and technology development in this present time, sadly wayang has become the hegemony itself between other Indonesian culture. Normatively, this monumental culture becomes iconic sublime through exclusively humongous performance in only certain social groups, which are middle and upper class societies. Wayang in normative perspective is

strengthened from the main source heritage values which come from the aristocracy tradition that has classical nuance, philosophical, sacred and magical. The other perspective sees wayang that has been brought into other media and different format especially comic, as marginal position, subordinate, *kitch* and not regarded as cultural creation or arts.

This paper describes the phenomenon of Boma game that inspired by wayang and its creativity development through media changing or transmedia storytelling that affects identity and gender role paradigm of Gatotkaca, which has deformed as new visual of Ghatokkacha character design in Boma game.

II. METHOD

In this study, interview is the primary source, the author conducted in-depth interview with visual artist of Anantarupa Studio, the creator of Boma Naraka Sura PC Game, Firshla Lita Dryma which is related with main team of the game. The secondary source is from literatures that is related with this study, from journals, books and on-line web articles. Collected data will be analyzed and presented in descriptive interpretive. According to Robert Elliot and Ladislav Timulak, the descriptive interpretive is a method which empiric description will be collected first without reading any literature [5]. The phenomenon in Boma game, especially the subject study "Ghatokkacha", starts in gaming activity, and will be continued and strengthened in a discussion which will include literature review to find the related data with this study. By analyzing the phenomenon of Gatotkaca and other wayang-inspired characters that had gone through sex changing in the Boma game to gain summary.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Author starts in literatures about wayang, the position of wayang which has requirement from the audience to know "the convention" is linked with the brought story with other story in overall repertoire, especially the enjoyment of watching wayang means to enjoy how wayang will be performed by the puppet master (*dalang*) [6]. According to *dalang*, which is the elder (*sepuh*), wayang should defend the "*pakem*", which means uniformity performance of wayang, including the storyline and the method of delivering the story to protect the tradition, sacred nuance and philosophical value (Yogyakarta type). Except of that, the wayang has been performed in innovative revitalization method with live performance collaboration, such as joke from the comedian or *campursari* live music, in order to gain more interest from the audiences. Also, delivering the message will be easier to be accepted by them, because there are some symbolic messages uttered by *dalang* and should be summarized in many story scenes. Sometimes, *dalang* do *sanggit* or tell the stories in their own version. Sadly the changing of wayang performance will be considered as harassment in tradition. In other perspective, wayang's story structure has been developed intensively to create another alternative in wayang performance, such as locally invented stories and characters (*Carangan*) that are not in Mahabharata or Ramayana. The purpose of this development is to gain more appreciation and acceptance because it is more related with the audience in their relevant daily life. The exemplary of center, considered wayang has been confirmed and inaugurated by UNESCO as "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of

Humanity” as cultural asset that should have progress in other unlimited creativity, rather than stagnant or involutif.

Referred to Sapardi Djoko Damono in *Alih Wahana*, the sustainability of wayang that has been brought into other media and delivered the process of creativity, instead of other aspects which are embedded with good or bad value, even capitalism interest. As known in transmedia narrative the wayang’s stories are told in multiple media platform, such as comic, wayang radio, animation and game, etc. The pureness of wayang kulit purwa or “pakem” has been deformed into new form of adaptation through media, especially comic. According to Prima Murti Rane Singgih [7] study in visualization of wayang comic character design before and after manga influence, which RA Kosasih gives visual experiences in wayang characters through classic wayang comic genre that gives confluence in other creativity in that genre. Character design that evolves in wayang comic tends to be visualized in realistic proportion, simplification in expression with curvy dynamic lines. Oerip in Gatotkaca Sewu draws combination of geometric and organic shapes in more realistic style. Manga influence is embedded in Garudayana by Yuniarto which is more realistic excessive in expression. The modern manga and simplification in expression used in Baratayuda by Caravan studio, is dominated with vivid color and color gradation that generates depth in the visual. The development of wayang through comic, both the stories (*carangan*) and visualization, indicated that the contemporary spirit from the creators who are inspired by wayang can give local values in cultural contributions to break the limitation of “pakem”.



Image. 1. Gatotkaca by R.A.Kosasih, Oerip, Yuniarto and Caravan Studio

IV. DISCUSSION

Boma Naraka Sura PC Game by Anantarupa Studios was launched in Kickstarter campaign as a crowdfunding project in July 3, 2015. It is updated with new contents, concept, visuals in game and other progress periodically. It is a fantasy game based on wayang’s philosophy that fills the aspects of metroidvania game genre. The other concept is using avatar which is described that one soul have different name and will be revealed throughout the story in game. This avatar concept has similarity with Asura Naraka wayang’s story in Javanese version, which *Bomantara* soul unites with *Sitija* (Boma Naraka Sura). In wayang, Boma is being described as antagonist and always has dissent with Gatotkaca. Uniquely, Boma game has swapped the concept of the story that puts Boma as protagonist and Gatotkaca as antagonist. Not only the role in the story, all developed wayang characters in this game have sex changing; Boma, Gatotkaca, Pashupati, Kresna become female character, including Yamantaka, who is known

in both Hinduism and Buddhism as a god. Author reckons that multi cultural and cross cultural aspects are also considered as game concept. Based on interview with Firshla Lita Dryma, visual artist in Anantarupa studios, the characters’s sex has been swapped to give indirect messages in order to break the patriarchal stigma, masculinities hegemony and social freedom of women. Besides that, their continuation of the game will be developed more in female perspectives, especially the story, including in-game dialogues with gods (masculine).

The popular Gatotkaca character in wayang which gives perception to local perspective through all wayang story already as a male, the visual posture in wayang itself is identified as well. Through narratives that said Gatotkaca’s body has “otot kawat balung wesi” (his muscles is made of wire and his bone made of iron) has connection in the study of youthful warrior masculinities in Indonesia by Pam Nilan, Argyo Demartoro and Agung Wibowo. Gatotkaca is considered as a local mythical source that magically reborn Javanese warrior, and Gatotkaca has long been a popular choice for warrior symbolism in Indonesia [8] in referenced to heroic narratives and legends as invulnerable warrior who defeats his enemies, and favors violence perspective in masculinities. Ghatotkacha in Boma game which is appeared female, indicated a contradictory characterization perspective with Gatotkaca in wayang. However, the Indonesian mindset of Gatotkaca identity that has thick mustache, dashing strong, wings and star lookalike symbol in his chest that is adopted from *wayang golek purwa* [9] and wayang kulit in Surakarta style, are visualization modification that developed in changing from giant shape into knight, with all attributes as well.

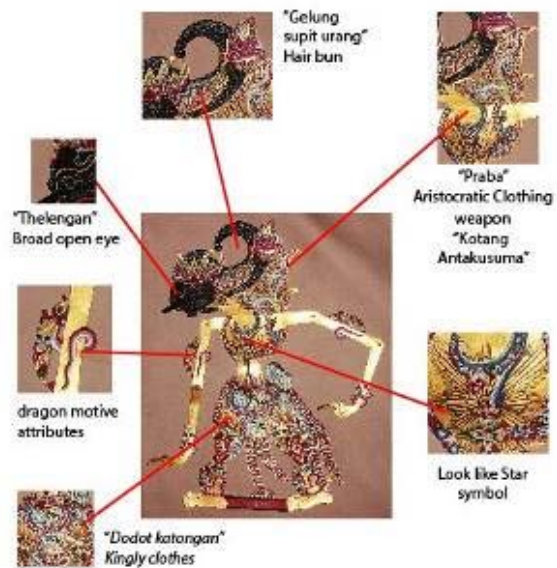


Image. 2. “Ghatotkaca” breakdown from wayang

In Gatotkaca breakdown from wayang in image. 2, we can see the appearance of each element that constructed the character of Gatotkaca in wayang. The optional star symbol in wayang becomes substantial in the identity of popular Gatotkaca that has been developed in other media. Aristocratic clothing and weapon *Kotang Antakusuma* are deformed into

other design form, that there are none in R.A. Kosasih artwork, are clearly drawn in Oerip and Yuniarso version, and the Caravan Studio version of Gatotkaca, they are deformed into pointy shape in character shoulders attributes. Gatotkaca in wayang has *malang kerik* gesture; dashing strong movement that always ready to fly.



Image 3. "Ghatotkacha" character design in Boma Naraka Sura PC game.

The playable character Sveta and other NPC, especially Ghatotkacha in Boma game, physically appeared in modern media ideal visualization of feminine beauty [10]. Harrison demonstrated that "curvaceously thin" with both combination skinny and curvaceous figure, big breasts, revealing clothing and likely to be scantily clad which is portrayed as sex object. In achievement campaign of Boma game in kickstarter and other social media, the backers (supporters of the project) got a free HD wallpaper of the game characters, which is visualized Sveta and Ghatotkacha wearing bikini on the beach. Set aside of masculinities appearance characterization of Gatotkaca in wayang which are related with aggressive looks, focusing in power, more muscular, not portrayed as highly sexualized, still, Boma game characters is placed as commodities which is viewed as a vision of beauty, common stereotypical portrayal of female characters that described by Dietz [11]. It has similarity and commonality in designing female character position as combination of sex and violence, also known as eroticized aggression [12]. Reviewed in top selling PC Game which are based on violence, sex, race and age [13] and other studies shows connection on how character in Boma Naraka Sura game designation support a successful fund that gains US \$28,383 from the backers.

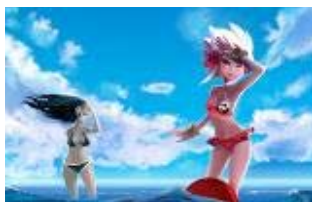


Image 4. Downloadable Boma Naraka Sura game desktop wallpaper

We can see the comparisons from the details of visual elements of the characters which are constructed between Ghatotkaca Sewu by Oerip, with Boma game design referred to image. 5 below.

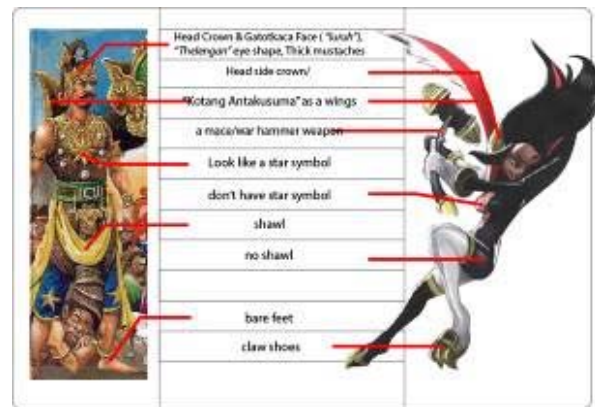


Image 5. Comparison between male and female Ghatotkacha

Mostly the appearance details have been deformed into new forms; the star symbol is completely replaced with big breasts, *Kotang Antakusuma* is replaced with wings and other elements are also changed. The author did not see the visual reflection of Ghatotkacha that refer to identity appearance of popular Gatotkaca. Despite of the visual differences, both characters concept are still described as sky warrior.

Referred to wayang novel as other wayang story development by Pitoyo Amrih[14], "The Darkness of Gatotkaca" emphasizes in giving alternative perspective in Gatotkaca as super power hero but also as humanist dispositive as well. The loneliness, anger, anxiety, and other psychological conflicts has been fulfilled in his sadistic behaviour and engaging brutality to kill his opponents which becoming perfect solace. From those perspectives in wayang's narratives development which is using other media, gives contemporary constructives in thinking critically or creatively in placing Ghatotkacha in antagonist perspective in Boma game. The Ghatotkacha roles within the game is still unclear because the game is still in development, therefore the personality can't be analyzed yet.

Beside the psychological identity, the visual attributes such as cloth, weapon property that still have the same concept with referenced Gatotkaca in wayang, but not with the visual form. Both in the game and wayang concept, the character still has role as the ruler of the sky, which is represented with wings attribute. In wayang, Gatotkaca's wings, the distinctive shape and form of *kutang Antakusuma*, is visually identified as Gatotkaca's attribute. In game adaptation, the element of the wings is still being used, and the role as ruler of the sky is emphasized with clawed foot, referred to bird claw visual. As for the weapon, the author assumed it has similarity with weapon of Bima, the father of Gatotkaca in wayang. Because in wayang, it is not common for Gatotkaca to use weapon such as mallet or war hammer.

The manga visual style in the game indicates a hybrid form, the contemporary creativity through concept in "local" cultural approaches to aim cosmopolitan gamers who thought it is hip and cool, in global aesthetics visual development. Author assumed the narratives structure from the Boma's demo game

(the game is not yet finished) typically follows the pattern of the heroic journey in shonen manga category as being described by Joseph Campbell, it is a hero cycle [15]. The cycle begins with the call to embark in an adventure which is caused by irresistible forces, continue with state of crossing the threshold between known world into the unknown world. Initiation of the hero will be facing trial and tests, finally the hero will learn and achieve some boon that will be used to revitalize the world and problems. With all aspects include storyline, visual form of the game, swapped sex and gender role, there are not yet strong indication that gives indirect message ideology about patriarchal stigma is being presented by the game, such as exemplary in story focusing equality in gender role, the unclear connection between swapped sex characters with the moral of gender equality. The game development should consider the genders nature between sex role to bring differences perspective to approach gender issues and not tend to be sexism.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of contemporary, wayang, especially Gatotkaca character, has been developed in many approaches, breakfree from *pakem*, sustained and deformed into other visual form and media, although, these developments could decrease the traditional sacredness value. Gatotkaca as an ideal masculinities and hero symbol, that already in the mindset of Indonesian, has distinctive visual identity especially the star symbol.

Anantarupa exploration through Boma Naraka Sura PC game has been designed in cultural aspect to represent local identity which is suitable with the era of global identity representation, especially by using manga approach which resulting in successful support from kickstarter backers. From criticism perspective, the visual of Boma's Ghatotkacha can be strengthened with visual identity of Gatotkaca perception among Indonesian, unless, the visual translation came from other narrative source besides wayang purwa visualization. However, there is still similarity in characterization concept, that described both as sky warriors.

Boma's Ghatotkacha altered perception in gender role issue is still unclear about its equality, since it is still in male gaze. The eroticized aggressive visual approach in Ghatotkacha game character, which has been deformed from the masculine visual perception of Gatotkaca, should be strengthened with gender related narratives to identify on how Ghatotkacha is being depicted in the game through characterization development, set aside the commercialism aspect as design strategy.

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