Gundala and Gatotkaca in the concept of modern Indonesian superheroes: Comparative analysis of the Indonesian and American superheroes

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Abstract

The superhero universe has always been an attraction in the world of film industry. The birth of superhuman ideas has made people increasingly interested in taking the storyline. This research is a literature study on the existence of a new world in Indonesian cinema that takes the theme of Indonesia's superhero universe competes against the universe of American superheroes. The purpose of this study is to compare Indonesian and American superhero films in order to understand the complete concept of depicting Indonesian superheroes in the process of switching from comics to films comparing with the same concepts in American superheroes. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method by comparing films from the Indonesian superhero universe namely Bumilangit Cinematic Universe and Jagad Satria Dewa Cinematic Universe compared to the American superhero universe namely Marvel Cinematic Universe and DC Cinematic Universe. The results obtained that there were some similarities in the process of character formation in each of the heroes that were created, this could be described with similarity in multiple personalities before and after becoming superheroes, costumes worn, storylines and special effects produced in the film. There were fundamental differences that were seen in the background of Indonesian culture that was different from the concept of American culture. Indonesian superheroes also highlighted Pencak Silat as the original identity and characteristics of Indonesia. This research concluded that a story with a superhero concept had the same story pattern such as a person with a superhero alter ego and deep with heroic storyline even though they were presented by different countries.

Keywords: *Indonesian superheroes; American superheroes; comparison, film*

INTRODUCTION

The journey of the concept of superhuman ideas that originated from legends and myths has been transformed into a popular culture that develops in society. The concept of humans who have superhuman abilities above the average human being is not something that is formed from a simple and instant idea. The process of creating a work is certainly based on the background of social criticism about the political issues that were happening at the time the work was created. Howe in Damono (1978) states that an author must involve himself in political upheaval, without this, the work created will feel bland. Adereth in Damono (1978) also strengthened Howe's statement by presenting the idea of *literature engagee* (literature involved), this matter means that there is involvement of literature and writers in politics and ideology. The influence of political ideology is the implementation of modern ideology on literature. Adereth explained that good *literature engagee* is only placing politics as a background in the process of creating a work.

The process of creating a super hero begins with the existence of legendary stories and ancient myths that formed in society. This belief is about the birth of humans who received the gift of strength from the gods. The influence of ancient mythology and legends in this hero-themed paradigm created a new superhero comic called *Superman* in June 1938 (Robb, 2014). *Superman* was a heroic symbol that was needed by the American people at that time because of the Great Depression which had made economic, social and environmental stability worse for a decade since 1929 due to the fall of the stock market in New York. American society needs a super hero who is able to give enthusiasm to rise from adversity and have great optimism to make America rise again (Johnson, 2012). A year after Detective Comics (DC Comics) successfully created *Superman*, Marvel through Carlos Burgo also successfully created a superhero character named *Human Torch* (Lee, 2011).

The creation of this superhero is a representation of the author's message to comic readers or directors to film viewers to become more patriotic and heroic to their country. The presence of *Captain America* in comics created by Jack Kirby, *Wonder Woman* created by William Moulton Marston and many more superheroes is very thick with an aura of patriotism and heroism towards America. These superheroes create a new spirit for all Americans that they already have superheroes they are very proud of.

The political and ideological factors underlying the process of creating a work in America, the concept of American ideology has also had a strong influence on the creation of superhero characters in Indonesia. The power of western influence is called the Americanization concept and has become a popular culture in comic and film industries. Williams in Strinati (2009) explains that popular culture is a culture that is actually created by people for their own interests. A form of work that is made to be liked by others and then shifted to a work that is liked by many people. Huxley in Strinati (2009) also explained that the concept of Americanization made him filled with a sense of optimism and excitement after a visit to America. He expressed the pleasure of seeing towers, buildings and other interesting things in America which resulted in the interpretation of his first view as a symbol of American interest in knowledge rather than superstition. American films are able to show a hero

who is more free and not limited by class boundaries so that it is more democratic (White, 1986).

The same concept was born in Indonesia, some artists in this country have created superhero comics that are very well known and became a trend in the 1960s to 1980. Some legendary comic artists who managed to create the fictional characters, such as Harya Suraminata or more familiarly called Hasmi, he created a native Indonesian super hero, called *Gundala Putra Petir*, Widodo Noor Slamet created *Godam*, R.A Kosasih created human characters descended from gods from his puppet comics called *Gatotkaca* and *Sri Asih*, then Ahmad Thoriq, who introduced the Indonesian super hero inspired by Madura-theme called *Caroq*, and a super hero by Hans Jaladara called *Panji Tengkorak*.

This research is a literature study that focuses on the comparison of Indonesian superhero multiverse and American superhero multiverse through things that have similarities in the background, story ideas and concepts of nationalism. Furthermore, the discussion also focused on the complexity and similarity of the superhero character in the multiverse of Indonesian superheroes and American superheroes. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a comparative literary approach.

METHOD
Qualitative research
The phrase qualitative methodology refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data — people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the meaning of people attach to things in their lives (Taylor et al., 2016). That statement explains that the qualitative method is a research method that produces data that can describe a human behavior and attitude that has a certain meaning that can be learned. The main focus of a researcher on research using qualitative descriptive methods is the meaning of people attaching to things in their lives. Central to the phenomenological perspective and hence qualitative research is understanding people from their own frames of reference and experiencing reality as they experience it (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

This research uses descriptive qualitative method on objects that has undergone a process of transformation from the realm of comics to the film industry. The process of transferring this object is not an easy thing, because it certainly requires high precision in the process of transitioning the embodiment of characters from comics to the film. Patricia Levy (2017) explains that this approach allows us to build a robust understanding of a topic, unpacking the meanings people ascribe to their lives — to activities, situations, circumstances, people, and objects.

Comparative literature
Damono (2009) explains that comparative literature is an approach in the science of literature that does not produce new or separate theories anymore. The interesting thing that this approach has is the flexibility of its application with any theory in a study of literary objects according to the object and purpose of the research. The basic concept of comparative literature is the

principle of comparing two or more works of literature. Remak in Damono (2009) provides a more detailed view of comparative literature, Literary studies outside the boundaries of a country and studies of the correlation between literature and other fields of science and beliefs such as art (for example, painting, sculpture, building art, and music), philosophy, history and social science (eg: politics economics, sociology), science, religion and others. In summary, comparative literature compares one country's literature with another country's literature and compares literature with other fields as a whole expression of life.

Based on Remak's view, it can be concluded that comparative literature has two tendencies, literature must be compared with literature and literature can be compared with the arts and even other disciplines. Comparative literature does not only focus on literature within a single country, but can transcend national and state boundaries to get a better understanding of trends and movements occurring in various nations and countries (Damono, 2009).

Original, borrow, traditions
The rapid development of information technology has produced old or new literary works that are directly or indirectly affected by the existence of other works. Various influences have merged into the process of creating a work so as to produce new works as a form of popular culture. The term 'influence' must be interpreted broadly, not merely as a process of imitation so as to produce a new literary work based on an existing literary work. The concept of influence has a broad spectrum, ranging from borrow to traditions, because writers have a tendency to borrow, directly or indirectly (Damono, 2009)

The objects of this research are heroes in Bumilangit Cinematic Universe and heroes in Jagad Satria Dewa Cinematic Universe compare to American heroes from Marvel Cinematic Universe and DC Comics Cinematic Universe. The selection of research objects are based on the considerations that there are many differences and similarities. The differences include the comparison of Indonesian superheroes and American superhero multiverse. The similarities lay on the concept of suit, the concept of league of heroes, the concept of massive battle between heroes from multiverse dimensions and also the imitation of Indonesian superheroes to American Heroes.

Here are the examples of concept of original, borrow, traditions in the work of fiction:

Figure 1: The depiction of a crossover between Indonesian superheroes and American superheroes in the 1970s in some of the Gundala Putera Petir comics by Hasmi

The concept of combining various superheroes in a story such as that created by Marvel in *Secret Wars* (1985) and *Civil Wars* (2006-2007) had been done by Indonesian comic artists during the heyday of Indonesian comics around 1960-1980s. Several superhero characters from America (Marvel and DC Comics) got combined together with Superhero characters from Indonesia. They were involved in a fierce battle in the *Gundala Putra Petir* comic entitled *Bentrok Jago-Jago Dunia*. This form of crossover was a common thing for Indonesian comic artists in the 1960-1980 era. This was done because the interest of Indonesian people towards western culture was very strong, so the step of combining the characters of superheroes from America and Indonesia was an effective strategy of Indonesian comic artists to attract the interest of their readers.

The concept of 'borrowing' superhero characters from Western culture has been very clearly demonstrated by the character creation of *Laba-Laba Merah* (first appeared in 1969) which was actually inspired by a Marvel character named *Spider-Man* (first appeared in August,1962). This is a tangible manifestation of the process of 'borrowing' the creation of American comic artists who was later combined into the culture of Indonesian society. The success of the *Laba-Laba Merah* had been running for several series but it had to be stopped because of constraints with copyright. It was undeniable that some of the superheroes that appeared in the series of *Brutal* and *Bentrok Jago-Jago Dunia* had similar concept, characteristics and storyline to Marvel and DC Comics.
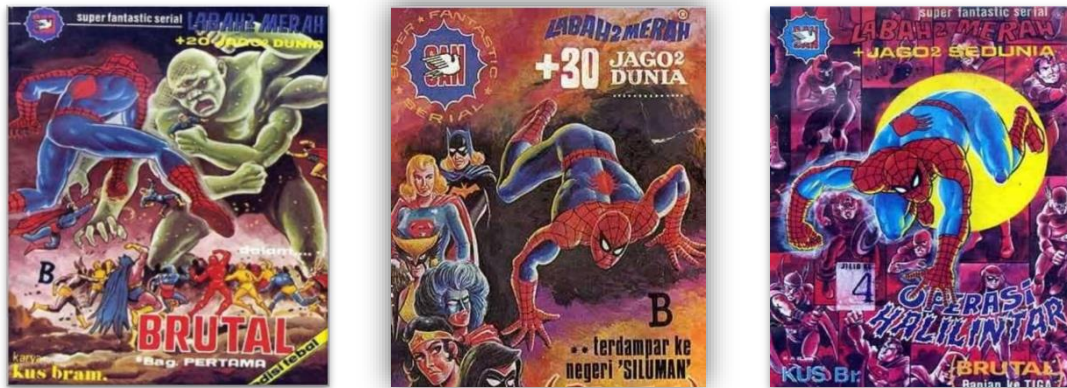
Figure 2: the concept of original, borrow and traditions of Labah-Labah Merah by Kus Bram in the 1969s which is inspired by Spiderman from Marvel Universe

Sampling technique

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling.

A. *Gundala* **Compares to American Heroes:**
1. *Gundala* was chosen as the research sample based on the following considerations:
   - The *Gundala* Movie has been released in Indonesia
   - *Gundala* in Bumilangit Cinematic Universe has similarity to *Storm* in Marvel Cinematic Universe and *The Flash* in DC Cinematic Universe
2. *Storm* was chosen as the research sample based on the power to manipulate weather, such as thunder, lightning, wind and rain over vast area.
3. *The Flash* was chosen as the research sample based on the power of electricity and lightning manipulation, speed forces which creates him to gain a speed, reflexes, agility, endurance and strength.

B. *Gatotkaca* **Compares to American Heroes:**
1. *Gatokaca* was chosen as the research sample based on the following considerations:
   - *Gatotkaca's* trailer has been released in Indonesia.
   - *Gatotkaca* in Jagad Satria Dewa Cinematic Universe has similarity to *Thor* in Marvel and *Shazam* in DC Comics
2. *Thor* was chosen as the research sample based on the power of releasing deadly blazing thunder, superhuman strength, speed, agility, durability, and immunity to most diseases.
3. *Shazam* was chosen as the research sample based on the power of physical and magical invulnerability, able to fly, enhanced mental perception, control over and emission of magic lightning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Comparison of Indonesian super heroes multiverse with American super heroes multiverse

Superhero universe is not only a simple matter created by the author, but its existence is very vast and complicated. A super hero is not necessarily in the same universe as other super heroes. As in the description of an American fantasy adventure story that classifies the characters in the story into four main elements of the fantasy creature class, called humans, elves, dwarfs, and wizards. The existence of superheroes also has different class classifications and universes. This can be explained by the existence of an American superheroes universe which divides its characterization into complex universe classes.

The characterizations complexity in a detailed classification of heroes class is also the same in the process of creating Indonesian superheroes. The following is a comparative table of character groupings according to the races or classes that exist in the universe of American super heroes and super villains aligned with the concepts of Indonesian super heroes and super villains in the world of comics and films.

Table 1. Characters classification according to the universe of superheroes

Multiverse of Marvel	Extended Universe of DC	Jagat Bumilangit	Jagad Satria Dewa
The Celestials: The oldest beings from the cosmic entity with the humanoid shape and countless power. This race is extraterrestrial races that their existence since the birth of the universe until this day. Ex: Ego, Eson The Searcher, Knowhere, Galactus..	**The Quintessence:** A group of all powerful beings from the universe. Their existence is to control the universe and as the guardians of eternity. Ex: Zeus, Shazam, Highfather, Phantom Stranger.	-	-
Extraterrestrial Races: A multidimensional cosmic creature spread in a vast multiverse. They are believed to have countless power and intelligence. Ex: Kree, Skrull, Ronan The Accuser, Draxx, Rocket Raccoon, Nebula.	**Extraterrestrial Races:** A multidimensional cosmic creature in a vast universe. They are believed to have countless power and intellegence. Ex: Superman, Supergirl, Martian Manhunter, Miss Martian, General Zod	**Extraterrestrial Races:** A multidimensional cosmic creature in a vast universe. They are believed to have countless power and intellegence. Ex: Godam and Xrephus from Covox, Aquanus from Planet Zyba.	-
Gods/ Deities: The powerful beings in Marvel Universe that are adapted from the Norse Mythology. They live in other dimensions. Ex: One above all, Old Gods, New Gods, Gods	**Gods:** They were Gods from extra-dimensional universe, who originated from various mythologies. Their existence is to control the balance of the universe.	**Gods:** The extraordinary beings from different dimension of this universe, called 'Kahyangan'. They have superpower ability to protect earth.	**Gods:** The overpower beings from another dimension of this universe. Their superpower abilities are far beyond human's power. They come to protect the

by Race.	Ex: Darkseid, Steppenwolf, Mister Miracle.	Ex: Sri Asih.	earth and destroy supervillain in this earth. Ex: Gatotkaca, Yudhistira, Bima, Nakula Sadewa, Srikandi
Humans: The intelligent inhabitants of earth, but humans have short lifespans and weak. Ex: Nick Fury, Natasha Romanoff, Scott Lang	**Humans:** The race that evolved on the planet Earth. They are generally considered an odd and intelligent species. Ex: Bruce Wayne, Detective Gordon.	**Humans:** The race that dwells planet earth. They are intelligent and weak. Humans do not have superpower ability. Ex: Ridwan Bahri	**Humans:** The race that dwells planet earth. They are intelligent and weak. Humans do not have superpower ability.
Mutant: Human beings that possessed a genetic trait called X-Gene. This genetic mutation caused by the X-Gene makes someone to be a superhuman. It is believed that this transfomation is the next stage of human evolution. Ex: Wolverine, Cyclops, Nightcrawler, The Thing, Deadpool, Magneto, Gambit, Jubilee.	**Metahuman:** Human beings that has extraordinary power that their abilities are beyond the limit of normal human. They have extra power which comes from genetic variant called metagene inside their body. Ex:Poison Ivy, Beastboy, Black Canary, Killer Croc, Firestorm, Braniac	**Superhuman:** Human beings that has superpower ability because of the accident of an experiment. The ability of superhuman strength can also be obtained from hard training over the years. Ex: Gundala, Pangeran Mlaar, Merpati, Dewi Api, Camar, Ghani Zulham, Pengkor, Si Buta dari Gua Hantu.	-
Demon: The powerful demonic beings from the mystical dark dimension. Ex: Dormammu, Malekith, Mephisto, Zarathos.	**Demon:** The powerful demonic beings from the mystical dark dimension. Ex: Nergal,Chantinelle, Balthazar, Lucifer.	**Genie:** A powerful mystical creature from different dimension. Their existence is to help someone who has the sacred object or destroy the human beings. Ex: Jin Kartubi. Nyi Nara Sati Si Siluman Buaya Putih, Demit, Siluman.	**Demon:** The powerful demonic beings from the mystical dark dimension. Ex: Buto Ijo, multidimensional creatures.

By referring to the table above, we can see a number of significant differences and these are based on the cultural and mythological differences found in each origin of the work created. With the complexity of the universe described in the comparative table above, it can be concluded that the two cultures (Indonesian and American) have their respective characteristics that underlie the making of the fiction.

Marvel emphasizes more complex stories from different superheroes in multiverse and all of these universes can correlate each other. The Marvel Cinematic Universe has a variety of characters based on science, magic,

sophisticated equipment and the complexity of the interconnected plot. DC Cinematic Universe has a pattern that is almost similar in the concept of the Marvel universe, but the characters in the DC Cinematic Universe have more typical of heroes who have outstanding strength and have abilities like gods.

Gundala as a superhero in Bumilangit universe is a representation of a humanist hero that represents an ordinary person who work as a security guard and he cannot stand with the social injustice around him (Gundala in Joko Anwar's version). He does not show over power strength but the dark and harsh background of life is the main trigger for this Indonesian superhero story. What distinguishes and attracts from the universe of Indonesian superhero is the concept of the story that emphasizes Indonesia's local wisdom, this is indicated by the statement of *Gundala* film producer, Wicky V. Olindo and *Gundala* director, Joko Anwar at the Toronto International Film Festival 2019 that "The thing you must know in our universe, there are no scientists or aliens coming from different planets, so you will have this kind of villains and it is very rooted to Indonesian Mythology." that the Bumilangit universe has a focus on battles with creatures in Indonesian mythology, such as 'siluman', 'demit' and 'setan'.

Gatotkaca, as a new superhero figure from the universe Jagad Satria Dewa, emphasizes the aspect of the javanese puppet world which is packaged in a modern form. The concept used is the figure of a God who is far from superhuman power. The battle of the gods is illustrated by a modern urban concept.

The complexity and similarity of superhero characters in the Indonesian multiverse superheroes and American superheroes.
The complexity and similarity of these super heroes can be a coincidence, accidental or an adaptation of the work of existing superheroes. These two Indonesian superheroes who have different universes have similar concepts and ideas from the characters of American superheroes. This can be illustrated through the explanation below:

Table 2. Characters powers similarity between Indonesian superheroes and American superheroes

Indonesian Superhero	Abilities	American Superheroes	Abilities	
Gundala	1. Able to cast lightning/ thunderbolt fist from his bare hands 2. Able to run as fast as a lightning 3. Has an ability to fight the villain with the martial art skill	*Storm*	1. has a superhuman power to fly 2. able to manipulate weather, such as thunder, lightning, wind and rain over vast area.	Superhuman powers
		The Flash	1. Has an extraordinary agility to run as fast as a lightning 2. Has an ability to fight the villain with the bare hands 3. Electricity and lightning manipulation.	

Indonesian Superhero	Abilities	American Superheros	Abilities	
Gatotkaca	1. Able to fly without wings 2. Has a physical invulnerability strenght 3. Has an extraordinary agility	*Thor*	1. Has a superpower ability to release deadly blazing thunder 2. Has a superhuman strength 3. Has a superhuman speed, agility, durability 4. Immunity to most diseases.	Gods/ Deities powers
	4. Has an ability to fight the villain with the martial art skill	*Shazam*	1. Has superpower of physical and magical invulnerability, 2. Able to fly 3. Able to enhanced mental perception 4. Able to control over and emission of magic lightning	

The similarities that appear in the *Gundala's* character of Bumilangit cinematic universe with *The Flash* in the DC Cinematic Universe are not a coincidence, but there is a concept of 'borrow' which is a form of adaptation from the work that had already been created. *Gundala* is a character created by Hasmi. he explained that the creation of *Gundala* was inspired by a Javanese spiritual figure, Ki Ageng Selo, who had the ability to catch lightning. *Gundala* is also combined with Hasmi's interest in *The Flash* character from DC Comics, therefore the costume worn by *Gundala* is very similar to the character of *The Flash*. The *Gundala* (remake version) costume at Bumilangit Cinematic Universe was designed in Indonesia and was made by a company in Los Angeles who also made superhero costumes *Daredevil* and *Watchmen*. The power of *Storm* in Marvel Cinematic Universe has the same pattern with *Gundala,* but in this case these both heroes have similarity as a superhuman.

The pictures below show the transition process of the *Gundala* character from the initial concept to the most modern concept:
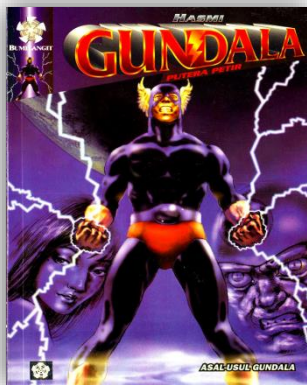

Figure 7. Initial Concept of *Gundala* by Hasmi

Figure 8. 1st *Gundala* Movie in 1981 by Lilik Sudjio

Figure 9. Remake of *Gundala* Movie in 2019 by Joko Anwar

On the other hand, *Gatotkaca* shown in the released trailer is very thick with gothic and dark elements. It can be seen through the costumes worn and the vehicle that he drives almost bears the same description of *Ghost Rider* in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The two superheroes, *Gundala* and *Gatotkaca*, have martial arts abilities based on Pencak Silat combat skills. Through this matter, local wisdom holds a very strong role in the story of Indonesia's superheroes.

These two pictures below are a comparison of the initial concept of R.A. Kosasih's *Gatotkaca* with the modern concept by Charles Gozali:

Figure 10. Initial Concept of *Gatotkaca* by R.A Kosasih

Figure 11. Modern Concept of *Gatotkaca* by Charles Gozali

CONCLUSION

The differences in the concept of Indonesian and American author's story ideas have been seen through the character grouping between the versions of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the DC Cinematic Universe compared to the Bumilangit Cinematic Universe and Jagad Satria Dewa Cinematic Universe. The existence of 'siluman', 'demit' and 'jin' who act as the main villains of Indonesian superheroes have shown a significant difference in the universe of Indonesian superheroes. This is certainly inversely proportional to the concepts and ideas of American author stories that are more focused on science, sophisticated equipment and the existence of aliens.

Original concepts, borrow and traditions that appear in the creation of Indonesian superheroes are a form of development of modern literature. The author makes a story based on historical background, politics or interest in the work of others. This mutual borrowing process has created a superhero character that has a strong side of Indonesian culture but is also influenced by western culture. *Gundala* and *Gatotkaca* that are made in this film version emphasize Indonesian mythology, but the concept of cultivation and storyline are made more modern and sophisticated. The similarity between Indonesian

superheroes and American superheroes in the realm of character and costume characterization is a form of Americanization in the Indonesian film industry.

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