

MESATUA: Adapting Bali Folklore Scripts and Plays to Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

Many stories, fairy tales, myths and folklore which are popular today are modified versions from the original. It is almost impossible to know the original or authenticity of the stories. Besides, the publicized and written versions of those stories are usually recognized as the authentic version. This study aims to collect and compose several stories from Bali for a written form. The result is the book titled 'Mesatua DKV UPH', in which the stories written were adapted from scripts and plays made by students of the department. The students wrote their play from stories and data that they gathered from their observations of artefacts, temples, and performances in Bali. The book has accommodated eight stories. In the end, the book is not only a documentation of a study tour activity, but also as documentation of stories that Indonesia, especially Bali, has in store.

Keywords: *Bali, Folklore, Book Design, Mesatua*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper's main aim is to showcase the process of a project, called 'MESATUA' project by the author and others in Universitas Pelita Harapan's Visual Communication Design Department. This paper begins by discussing some of Homer's theories, with the hope of showing the relationship between story, storytelling and authorship. After building an argument on how written stories are necessary for the sake of the story itself, the paper then explains about the whole 'MESATUA' project. After that, the author explains the 'MESATUA' book in further detail. In the end, the author concludes by summarizing the paper and gives a perspective on how national folklore is relevant and necessary for a nation.

A discourse about a story will certainly cover not only the content of the story but also how the story is presented. Most folklores are stories that are told, or even sung, to the audiences. The oral methods of presenting these stories are the simplest and oldest method that is known to mankind. This method is clearly not without any flaws, most of the poet or storyteller tells a different story. Although the difference is minor and sometimes insignificant, the slight difference is accumulated and later creates a totally different story. Those are simple examples of how oral methods of storytelling have issued a need to rely on other methods to supplement the oral method in story preservation, especially when authorship is a part of the discussion.

As happened to Homer, he is recognized for the epic poems 'The Illiad' and 'The Odyssey' as he is credited with both poems. However, historians found not many shreds of evidence or records of Homer existence. The poems that he is attributed to, are known for its repetitive elements in which the poems are similar to a song [1]. This particular manner of poetry suggests that Homer is a bard, singing his songs and stories to his audiences. As Homer is believed to present his stories orally, his works are categorized as primary epics [2]. A theory suggests that Homer is not a man, but a group of men that tell the story repeatedly. By repeatedly telling a story (though different iterations, still same in essence), it shows that storytelling is a tradition, and telling stories help to polish and learn the tales more and more. Especially when it is related to the circumstances or context in which the story is being told [3]. Another theory points out that Homer (if he were a man) was an influential person at the time when 'The Illiad' and 'The Odyssey' were popular. Since the poet and the poem were popular at that time, people start to connect and relate the two [4]. This suggests that Homer may not be the author of the literature, not even the one who started the oral stories. But at the end of the day, whether Homer is a man or men, or whether he is the author of 'The Illiad' and 'The Odyssey', the more important part of the discussion was the significance of the work. The work itself has qualities that create its own authority. What matters is how inspiring and impactful the stories of 'The Illiad' and 'The Odyssey', how they can teach us about the culture and tradition of the Greeks.

One opinion on how Homer is credited for both ‘The Iliad’ and ‘The Odyssey’ was when he sang or told his stories orally, he had someone made a written version of it. These written forms of Homer’s epic later become something that is popular until today. This view, however, questions whether the author simply wrote down everything Homer said, or whether the author captured Homer’s story and then told it in his perspective. However, this Homer’s authorship issue suggested the significance of writing, whatever version of ‘The Iliad’ or ‘The Odyssey’ was being written [5]. As described, oral literature is an art that is delivered and transmitted orally from person to person, generation to generation, region to region, etc., by word of mouth. It is basically a creative expression of the traditional beliefs and customs of people which is told by the old grandfather/mother to the little children, and passed on again once they become adult and have their own children. Stories continue to change from generation to generation, and new elements enter the story, something that is more contemporary and related to changes in society / culture [6]. Based on the theories on Homer; it can be concluded that the written form of a folklore is very important. The folklore recorded may not be in its purest form, but a written one is expected to be beneficial and can be maintained properly compared to oral storytelling.

Indonesia has many folklores and myths that are scattered throughout the nation. Many books, from academic books, storybooks or even children books have their own iteration; some adding parts, others omitting them, and some have contradictory details with other iterations. In the end, iteration of a story is meaningful in its own accord, and each story has its own truth and values. One region in Indonesia that is rich in folklore and stories is Bali. Historically and also culturally, Bali has numerous influences from some factors, namely religion, culture, and tradition. These external influences shape Bali and its stories, hence creating a unique folklore landscape compared to other regions nearby. Due to several activities relating to Bali by Universitas Pelita Harapan’s Visual Communication Design department, the authors have had the opportunity to collect and re-write some stories from Bali. The outcome of the whole journey is a book, called ‘MESATUA’. The title is a Balinese word for ‘storytelling’, which is also used for identifying various activities related to the book.

2. METHOD

The whole process of making the ‘MESATUA’ book had three different stages. On the first stage, students on a study tour in Bali were given assignment to present a Bali folklore or story with a play later after they return from the trip. On the second stage, the exhibition and play were held and supervised. On the last stage, the iteration of stories was interpreted written down based on the students’ performance.

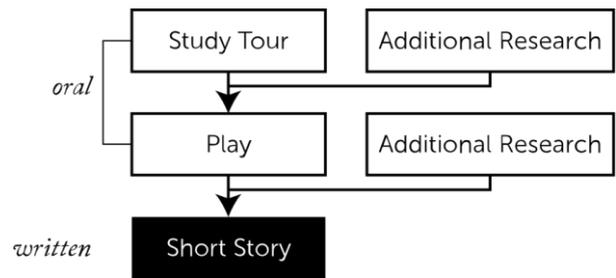


Figure 1. Diagram Explaining the Mesatua Project

During each stage, there were additional researches performed to supplement the writing of each iteration of the story. The whole researches used a qualitative approach. On their trip to Bali, the students had an observation, interview, and literature review before writing their scripts for play. The authors also did observation and literature review before writing the iteration of stories that were performed by the students. The additional researches were made mostly to cross-check a fact, clarify some parts of the story that seemed off, provide additional insight on the story’s context, and to see other iterations of the story that might provide a different perspective from the main story that was referenced.

2.1. The Study Tour

In October 2018, several lecturers and the class of 2018 from UPH Visual Communication Design went to Bali for a week study tour. The study tour was part of the first-semester study programme in the department. The places that were visited during the trip were Garuda Wisnu Kencana, Uluwatu, Rumah Topeng & Wayang Setiadarma, Antonio Blanco museum, Gunung Kawi temple, Bandem Silver Workshop, Kerta Gosa, and Green School Bali. Though not all destinations were historical or cultural sites, the main objective of the Study Tour was for the students to experience Bali; to observe and to interact with Balinese while studying about stories (and folklore) existed in Bali.



Figure 2. Documentation of the Students Visiting Rumah Topeng & Wayang Setiadarma in Bali. Photographed by Chandra Djoko.



Figure 3. Documentation of the Students on Gunung Kawi Temple During the Study Tour. Photographed by Chandra Djoko.

For Budaya Visual Indonesia subject’s assignment, the students were asked to record a native story in Bali. The students were also asked to search for further information about how the stories represent or mean to the Balinese as later when they return on class, they would perform a play based on the story they discovered in Bali. They were also tasked to find visual references that may enrich them on visualizing the story, to complement their play with appropriate costume, set designs and other props that are necessary for their play.

The activities that the students do during their stay were quite various. In Garuda Wisnu Kencana and Uluwatu, the students watched a traditional dance performance, including *Kecak*, a dance with a story incorporated within the dance. The students learned the story through the performance. In Rumah Topeng & Wayang Setiadarma, Kerta Gosa and Gunung Kawi temple, the students were accompanied by a guide and toured the site. On the tour, the guide told them about the stories that were related to the place, such as folklore, mythologies or even real events that occurred on the site.

2.2. The Exhibition & Play

As the students returned, they were given one month to prepare an exhibition and play to showcase their research during the trip to Bali. The students prepared their play with supervision from the lecturers and also their seniors. The title of the exhibition and play was called ‘Mesatua’ (which is later adopted as the title of the book). The exhibition was held for a week inside the campus. The works presented at the exhibition were students work from the first-semester classes, such as computer graphics, drawing, and also Budaya Visual Indonesia.



Figure 4. Poster of Mesatua Exhibiton & Play. Design by Valerie Wirjaatmadja & Eldad Timothy.



Figure 5. Documentation of The Exhibition. Photographed by Adrian Owen.

For the play, there were three classes and each class had three groups, resulting in nine groups in total. Each group performed a story, except the Ramayana story that was split into two parts and performed by two different groups. Most of the students created their costume from their everyday wear added by some DIY accessories. They also created props from paper, styrofoam and also cardboard. For the play, some groups simplified and modified the stories that they heard during the study tour. The adjustments were made as the play had limitations, such as play duration, number of character and number of students, and also the vast locations that were too much to visualize in a play.



Figure 6. Documentation of The Play. On the frame was Empu Siwagana from "Barong Landung" played by Michelle Hartawan. Photographed by Adrian Owen.

2.3. The Short Story

Whereas in the first two stages the authors took a secondary role in making and telling the story, in the last stage the authors actively participated in the process. The authors researched, then wrote (and edit) the stories. The short story had some differences compared to the story in the play. This decision was made because the authors needed to focus on narrative structure and characterization. The authors structured the stories and decided on a point of view that would later showcase the characters well. Compared to the play, the short story doesn't use any visual medium that may help the storytelling. This makes the short story focuses more on dialogue and plot.

After the short stories were finished, the authors compiled the stories and also documented photographs of the study tour and play into the 'MESATUA' book. After the book was finished and reviewed, it was published by Penerbit Fakultas Desain Universitas Pelita Harapan. The book is used for internal archives and isn't sold commercially. However, the book is intended to be given to guest lecturers, department partners and also other agencies or institutions that need the book.

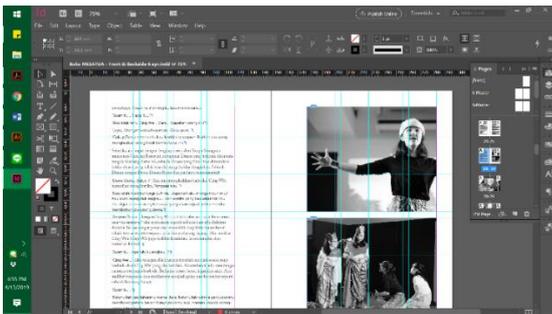


Figure 7. Documentation of The Book Design Process from the Author.

3. RESULT AND DISSCUSION

This section describes the book in detail, starting from the formal aspects, the content, and also the visual design of the book.

Table 1. Book Detail

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Registered Book Title | Titik Temu 8: MESATUA |
| Authorship | Brian Alvin Hananto (Author), Kartika Magdalena Suwanto (Editor) |
| International Serial Book Code | 978-602-53005-4-7 |
| Size | 148mm x 210mm |
| Number of Pages | 178 |

Regarding the main content of the book, there are two different contents that are displayed in the book, the short stories and also the photographs of the play. The photographs of the play are located after each story ends; the decision is made since the photographs do not directly correlate one another (as some short stories are structured differently from the play). However, the

photographs are necessary to show the student works and to give a feel of the story and characters.

There are a total of eight stories which are adapted into nine short stories (one story was split into two parts). The stories have a different point of view, to create a diverse and style of approach to the stories. The stories are structured in a way that creates a contrast from one story to another afterwards. The overall story, order and also story premises of the 'MESATUA' book can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. List of Short Stories & Its Premises

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 'RAMA' | An exiled prince that has his wife taken from him by the king of giants and is on his journey to find his wife. |
| 'BARONG LANDUNG' | A king that travels to a mountain to find a way to have a child only to fall in love with another woman. |
| 'NI DIAH TANTRI' | A king that finds comfort from a woman who tells him folklore after the king's mother died. |
| 'GARUDA WISNU KENCANA' | The spiritual journey of Garuda to find a way to save her mother from slavery. |
| 'GAJAH MADA & KEBO IWA' | The oath of a general and his confrontation with a Balinese giant in hope to unite the nation. |
| 'PUPUTAN KLUNGKUNG' | A king has to decide whether to surrender to invaders or to fight a fight that he can't win. |
| 'CALON ARANG' | A man marries a witch's daughter to stop the witch from cursing the village. |
| 'SUTASOMA' | A spiritual journey of a king to understand true love while terrors of a cannibalistic king haunt the land. |
| 'SINTA' | A woman waits for her husband to save her from his kidnapper only to find her husband doubts her chastity. |

The recurring themes that can be seen in the short stories are spirituality (and religion), royalty, journey, and war. The stories are also mystical in a way except for the story of Puputan Klungkung. The fantasy-like stories found in Bali also has tight correlation with the Hindu religion. Most characters in the story also revolve around the concept of Dharma, the role of every individual in the world. The characters in the story are either looking for their purpose or questioning their current role that life has given them.

As the book's main content was the short stories, and the main purpose of the book was to tell about the stories; the authors decided to create the book in A5 size (148mm x 210mm). The book size was chosen as most common novel books were around that size, ranging from 13cm x 19 cm to A5 size. The size was also chosen as it was efficient in terms of printing production.

The book is produced in black and white, hence all the photographs were converted to black and white. The decision to use black and white only was not defined

simply by production issues (the book uses a paper book, which the printer deemed does not produce good colors), but more an aesthetic decision. The color was removed to focus more on the light and shadows of the image in order to show a contrast yet intense emotion on the photographs.



Figure 8. Example of Photos Shown on ‘MESATUA’ Book. This was from one of the plays, "Calon Arang", when Calon Arang share offerings with Dewi Surga.

As the book tells an imaginative iteration of the famous Bali folklore, it is decided to represent the idea by showcasing the beauty of Bali in an indirect way. The book’s cover is a photograph of Bali’s sky on the beach, taken during the author’s trip to Bali. The photo of the beach’s sky was during a cloudy sunset, and the color of the sun and sky creates a mysterious yet appealing feeling. To create a distinct feel from the black and white inside content of the book, the cover is left colored. The photograph is slightly blurred, to enhance the sense of ethereal. The cover is then finished by adding typography for the title of the book. The title is located in the upper right corner of the cover, and the size of the text is small. The design decision is used to minimize disruptions on the photograph. The title is rotated ninety degrees counter-clockwise to create juxtaposition with the photograph.



Figure 9. The Design of the ‘MESATUA’ Book’s Cover. Photographed and Designed by the Author.

Overall, the book is created and meant to capture the activities of the author and students did. The content of the book is a collaborative effort of all people who participated in the study tour, the exhibition & play, and the boot process. The book shows not only the journey of the characters but also the journey of the department in the context of learning about Bali’s culture, tradition and also folklore.

4. CONCLUSION

By the time the paper was being written, the book had been finished receiving its ISBN and barcode and was in the middle of printing. Although the book serves its purpose for documenting the activities by the department, the book is proof of what the students did and participated in their studies. The book is not just a record, the book is a manifestation of the attempt and zeal of revisiting old stories that Bali owns. ‘MESATUA’ is an action to initiate a restoration of the storytelling tradition. The stories shared through ‘MESATUA’ may not be original iterations of the story, but it serves as introductory or tertiary literature for the stories.

The stories that Homer is closely associated nowadays may be relevant and impactful for us, whatever iteration we may know of. The evolution and changes of the stories are shaped by the perspective of the storytellers, and it later may be retold by others using their own perspective. This subjective view of storytelling is what triggers variations of stories, but we shouldn’t see that necessarily as a bad thing. It may shift or even reduce elements from the stories, but when the essential aspects of the story aren’t changed, it shows that the story is impactful on its own, whoever the storyteller and whatever iterations it may be.

As folklore and old stories are passed on orally, preparing written copies to supplement the oral tradition has become necessary. The abundance of information (and story iterations) on the internet sometimes can be overwhelming to the reader. As information on the internet come and go, and may be changed in a matter of seconds, having a printed copy of information ironically may be necessary. The printed matter also suggests authority and prestige compared to the internet, as the time needed for book production implies commitment, and that commitment is sometimes translated as quality.

As an individual, our history and past help to define our identity; the same thing also applies to a nation. The nation’s root (which can also be found on its folklore) is necessary to remind itself of who it really is. As we welcome the advent of globalism, we often forget our own identity, hence eliminating traits that make us as an individual. Often we can find wisdom and teachings from stories of the old. The folklore reminds us values that bring our nation to this state; surely it will remind us later on in the future. And so, preserving our nation’s folklore has become a necessity that not many people has been conscious of.

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