

The Female Heroes Who Can't Never Be Alone: The Portrait of Dependent Girls in Two Horror Webtoons

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Abstract

At a glance, the presences of female hero figures in fictional stories can be considered as gender equality as they emphasized the important role of the characters who become the agents of change in the stories. The two horror digital comics in a platform called Webtoon, namely *Kemala* and *10 PM*, are not only inspired by Indonesian Urban Legends, but also have female lead characters. They are *Kemala* and *Viska* who intended to fight the devil spirits and make everything back to normal again. *Kemala* is a female ghost who helped the lost spirits to go to the afterlife, while *Viska* is a college student who has the ability to see ghosts and enter the spirit dimension. Even though *Kemala* and *Viska* become the heroes, the two were accompanied by other male characters in order to fight the devils. This article describes how the female heroes are represented as the figures who still depend on others. This research uses qualitative method by analysing the visual data from two corpus, namely *Kemala* and *10 PM* (Season 1). The result of this research indicates the cliché of female stereotypes in patriarchal culture.

Keywords: Webtoon, female hero, horror digital comics

1. INTRODUCTION

The word "hero" can be defined in various positive ways. According to the research conducted by Allison and Goethals, there are eight traits of a hero which they usually called The Great Eight. They are smart, strong, selfless, caring, charismatic, resilient, reliable, and inspiring (Allison & Goethals, 2014).

Meanwhile, the heroism in fictional work itself is also related to gender identity. The number of male superheroes is going higher than female superheros. Unlike the females who tend to work together, the male superhero usually becomes the one man show. This made the portrait of female heroes seem less powerful (Miller et al., 2016).

The presence of young female heroes who have accompanys in order to beat the villain characters can also be seen in two digital horror comics, namely *Kemala* and *10 PM* in a platform called Webtoon.¹ Even though both *Kemala* and *Viska* have certain special abilities to help the others, they are still surrounded by other male protagonist characters who enable them to gain victory.

Besides being supported with additional horror sounds and inspired by Indonesian urban legends, the fact that the female heroes in *Kemala* and *10 PM* were assisted by other

¹ *Kemala* which was launched its first episode on 2020 was written by Sweta Kartika and I Wayan Suma Bagia. It was illustrated by Dedy Koerniawan and Pierre Rangga. Meanwhile, *10 PM* who was created by Arvidan launched its first episode on 2019.

male characters shows the portrait of female dependency to male and the importance of treating comics like other texts which can be studied. As one of the popular culture products, the position of comics as a text is underrated and considered as only-for-children or unqualified. But in fact, this perception is irrelevant for this era. There is no distinction between the main text which should be studied and the underestimated text such as comics because the development of humanities has broken the boundaries between them (Kurnia, 2016).

Using the qualitative method by analysing the visual data from *Kemala* and *10 PM*, this article will describe how the identity of the heroine is constructed by the presence of the males who protected and guided them so that they wouldn't make any wrong decisions. Both *Kemala* and *Viska* as the main female characters represent the stereotype of females in patriarchal culture in Indonesia.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The patriarchal culture has created doctrines which are universally accepted. One of the most common doctrines is the glorification of male rather than female (Rahmawati, 2016). The masculine historical structure appeared unconsciously in the society's perception and appreciation (Bourdieu, 2001). The male domination in *Kemala* and *10 PM* can be seen through the relation between the characters. Even though *Kemala* and *Viska*, the main female protagonists, showed their heroic acts and solve others' problems, they still needed assistance from some men, who could be categorised into two groups, namely the ones who help them directly and the other ones who help them indirectly.

2.1 The Female Fighters Who Came with Their Accompanies

Kemala and *Viska* intended to defeat the devils who were associated with the deviant sects. But, they were not the single fighter as there were other men they were mostly close with who came along to fight the demons. Those men not only have special abilities, but also represent some male dominance signs.

2.1.1 *The noble man*



Figure 1. Chakra

In *Kemala* Webtoon, *Kemala* defeated *Sulastris*, the villain of this story with *Chakra*, an indigo boy who is used to do astral projection in order to help any spirit or lost soul. *Chakra* is depicted as a male who stands out by his social status and abilities. Compared to *Kemala*, *Chakra* is definitely more powerful than *Kemala* as he is guided by a special guardian, namely

Kyai Karang Jagasura. Having Kyai Karang Jagasurya as his guardian also allowed Chakra to take control over other spirits.

The dominant male stereotype in Chakra character can also be represented by his independence. His grandfather and mother who raised him had passed away, but Chakra could still make a living and go to school by selling the gemstone rings in the market. In this comic, Chakra always appeared alone without any other person. When Kemala was attacked by an old woman spirit, Chakra came as a hero who fought back that evil.

The privilege Chakra has in the mystical world was also motivated by his noble social status. In the previous life, he was known as Padri who was targeted by the witchcraft. When his master, was sick, he ordered Padri to *mokhsa* (*reincarnate*) so that he could avoid the evil spirit.

2.1.2 The ideal men



Figure 3. Candra



Figure 4. Bramasta

Viska, an indigo college student who wanted to stop the evil deeds in a radio show called 10 PM was helped by two men, they are her older brother, Candra and a *Genduruwo* (mythical creature from Java) called Bramasta. The presence of Candra and Bramasta shows some traditional masculinity stereotypes like fighting and supporting family (Smith, 2011).

Although Viska herself has a great power that even enabled her to travel to the astral world, the boys' perception still can be signified in this story.

Both Candra and Bramasta were depicted as muscular men. They are good at fighting. Candra was able to protect his younger sister from the ghosts, so was Bramasta who lived near Candra and Viska. After that incident, Candra built a mystical fence in the house where he, his wife, and Viska live to avoid the disruption from the demons.

The masculinity stereotype also appears on Candra and Bramasta daily routine. Candra is a breadwinner for his family as his parents had passed away, while Ila, his wife, stays at home. Meanwhile, Bramasta who lives near Candra and Viska is a guard in the spirit world who is responsible to make sure the humans and spirits in his protection area are safe and protected from any evil souls.

Candra and Bramasta didn't let Viska fight Ludira, the villain in this story alone. When Viska was going to the 10 PM radio station office, Candra and Bramasta joined her and attacked the spirit. This was also motivated by the fact that Candra and Viska parents' death was caused by that devil in 10 PM radio.

2.2 The Guidance from Men for The Girl Heroes



Figure 4. Pak Guru



Figure 5. Dieter

The male characters in *Kemala* and *10 PM* didn't only appear as the female warrior accompanies. Some of them also help the girls without being directly involved in the fight. Their experiences and skills played a significant role as the main key to the girl heroes' successfulness.

2.2.1 *The man and boy spirits who lead the way*

Besides assisting Chakra, *Kemala* as the heroine was also helped by two male spirits who had stayed longer in the school than her. They are a man called *Pak Guru* and a dutch boy named Dieter. Both died in the school during the Japanese colonial era and also have special abilities which are helpful for *Kemala's* missions.

Pak Guru who was depicted as a man wearing *blangkon* became *Kemala's* reliable informant. He brought a book which contains the stories of the lost spirit trapped in the school. While Dieter, a young Dutch student spirit, had an ability to transfer *Kemala* into other periods of time.

2.2.1. *The male as the advisor*

As the male guardian in his neighborhood, *Bramasta* didn't only inform *Viska* about her potential, but also taught her how to transfer and give her energy to *Candra*. Even though *Bramasta* wasn't involved directly to fight *Ludira*, he gave the useful clue for *Viska* to win over *Ludira*. He told her that *Ludira's* energy is getting stronger on Thursday night, therefore *Viska* should meet *Ludira* except that day.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Comics in this era can be enjoyed on a digital platform, which can give other experiences as it also contains sound. But this doesn't mean that comics are merely entertainment. As a fictional text, comic which is often considered as an inessential text can also represent the reality in a certain society.

The main female characters in two horror Webtoons, namely *Kemala* and *10 PM* indicated the figure of young girls, who are brave to combat with the antagonist characters, namely the devils. Even if they are eager to face the devils, they are still represented as weak and inferior to the male characters. Without the help from those men, they won't be able to combat their enemies.

Even if the presence of male characters in *Kemala* and *10 PM* shows the stereotypes in patriarchal society, this doesn't mean that they used it to oppress the inferior, precisely the girls. Instead, they help the female warriors to reach their goals.

4. SUGGESTIONS

While this research focuses on the interaction between the characters and the roles of the male figures, there is also another opportunity to look at the depiction of the female figures based on their appearances and compare it to the other horror comics who also have female figures.

Reading the comics in Webtoon allows the reader to interact with other readers and the creators. This research can be extended by looking at those communities' interactions. There are always some comments who will be the top comments and discussions which can be used as further research.

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