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Special Issue

**Nation(alism), Identity and Video Gaming**

edited by

Lisa Kienzl and Kathrin Trattner

## Issue 11 (2019)

Introduction. Thoughts on the Entanglement of the Concepts and Notions of a Nation, Nationalism and Identity in Relation to Video Games and Gaming Culture  
by Lisa Kienzl and Kathrin Trattner, 1

### article

Glory to Trumpland! Critically Playing Border Games  
by Melissa Kagen, 23

### reports

Round Table Discussion on *Nation(alism), Identity and Video Gaming* with Megan Condis, Marijam Didžgalvytė, Georg Hobmeier and Souvik Mukherjee  
by Kathrin Trattner and Lisa Kienzl, 65

Playing America. An Introduction to American Culture through Video Games  
by Michael Fuchs and Stefan Rabitsch, 86

Research Report on Curse the Fiends, Their Children, Too: Cultural Heritage and Subversion of Fictional Tropes in *Bloodborne*  
by Sarah Zaidan, Richard Pilbeam and Elin Carstensdottir, 103

### interviews

Interview with Mira Wardhaningsih from StoryTale Studios on the Indonesian Horror Game *Pamali*  
by Kathrin Trattner, 117

# Interview with Déyfou-lah Sani Bah-Traore on the Togolese Game *Origin – the Rise of Dzitri*

by Lisa Kienzl, 127

## reviews

### *We. The Revolution, a Review. Vive la Révolution or Death and All His Friends*

by Kevin Recher, 134

### *Kingdom Come: Deliverance. A Bohemian Forest Simulator*

by Eugen Pfister, 142

# Interview with Mira Wardhaningsih from StoryTale Studios on the Indonesian Horror Game *Pamali*

Kathrin Trattner

### Abstract

An interview by Kathrin Trattner with Mira Wardhaningsih, Cultural Content Director from StoryTale Studios about the game *Pamali*.

**Keywords:** Indonesian Game Development, Game Developer, Horror, Pamali, gameenvironments

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### Q1: What is StoryTale Studios? When was it founded and created, by whom, and why or for what purpose?

StoryTale Studios is a small creative indie studio based in Bandung, Indonesia. It was founded by then-college students Andreas, Chandrika, Mira, Aulia, and Irfan. We started the company back in 2016 with a goal to create something valuable in an efficient, humble, and agile manner through disruptive innovation back when we were undergraduates who were still learning at universities. We wanted to spread wisdom through everyday stories that we heard into something that can be valuable. It was hard and tough, because we realized that it was a path that most Asian parents would not really approve of. We were just a bunch of college students back then with no office, no capital, no access to resources. However, we slowly moved and dragged ourselves to get everything sort of balanced and we finally have developed (and are still developing!) *Pamali*.



Figure 1. The StoryTale Studios team.

**Q2: What was the idea behind *Pamali*? What is unique about it?**

There are two ideas behind the development of *Pamali*:

First, we believe that horror is different in every culture. In Indonesian culture, horror is very closely related to mythical and supernatural issues. It is so engrained in our daily lives that we sometimes take it for granted and do not realize it. It is like we are born, living, sleeping, and breathing horror. We want to show that Indonesian horror is unique that it does not develop from a big catastrophic phenomenon or a specific

horrifying accident, but rather a repeated daily activity that can be encountered basically anytime. It is unique because we take a bit of our culture that is very common and ordinary in our lives.

The second idea is that we also believe that we want to give players a chance to do everything *logically*. We want to make it as realistic as possible. It does not make sense if the player, who is originally unwilling to be inside a haunted house, has to continue exploring the obviously haunted place. We want to give every choice possible, to make a player think: *If I were in this kind of situation, what would I do?* We want to give a glimpse of our daily life through our game and the choices presented (that will later determine the course of your gameplay) will give an immersive world building in the gameplay itself.



Figure 2. A haunted house in *Pamali* © StoryTale.

### Q3: What does *Pamali* mean?

The name Pamali comes from the Sundanese (an Indonesian tribe that comes mainly from West Java) word *pamali*, loosely meaning taboo or prohibition in English. It is one of the most common words, as we actually grow up hearing *pamali* over and over again.

*Pamali* is a saying whose meaning is similar to a taboo, a social or religious custom prohibiting or forbidding discussion of a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing. The concept of *pamali* may have been triggered by several things. Most importantly, as *pamali* takes form of causes and punishments, it may have been created in order to establish a fear of doing activities that are deemed inappropriate or rude in a culture.

Some *pamalits* are logical, others are not. However, *pamali* has been one of the most distinct Indonesian cultures, as one would simply not grow up without at least hearing or believing in one.

There are several categories in *pamali*:

- Weddings and Marriages: Pamali that surrounds weddings and marriages activities, including engagement rituals and practices.
- Pregnancy and Birth: Pamali that concerns pregnancy, babies, and what a woman should do or not do to achieve perfect labor or to have the perfect child.
- Death: Pamali regarding death, which also includes pamali that you should heed in order to avoid death or even the pamali that can lead you to death.



- Farming: As Indonesia was once an agricultural country, farming is still considered one of the most important aspects of life. This pamali category is specifically created for everything about farming.
- Daily Life: Pamali that revolves around daily activities that cannot be specifically categorized. This includes eating, combing hair, washing clothes, etc.
- Time Sensitive: Pamali that gives time-specific rules, like what you should or shouldn't do at night, for example.
- Gender Sensitive: Pamali that is specifically addressed to a certain gender, like what a man should or should not do and how a woman is supposed to behave.
- Children and Babies: Pamali that is specifically addressed to small children, most likely below the age of 12 years or before their puberty hits.

Examples of *pamali* that we've implemented into the game are "you shouldn't take a bath at night, or ghosts will come to you", or "you shouldn't throw scissors away because they will protect you against evil spirits".



Figure 3. Pamali is about horror in everyday life and activities © StoryTale.

**Q4: Pamali is described as Indonesian Folklore Horror that gives players an authentic experience of Indonesian culture and horror. Can you elaborate on that?**

It all comes from the idea behind Pamali itself: We believe that every culture has a different perception towards horror. The monstrosity of serial killers might be very terrifying in one culture, whereas another culture thinks that sea monsters are the most haunting thing that exists on this earth. In Indonesia, it's not a *big, catastrophic, one-time phenomenon* that is terrifying; it is something else, something closer. We are scared of our ghosts, of our monsters, our spirits, because we can actually meet them at any time, for they are closely related to our own daily lives.

In Indonesia, we believe that we should be respectful and polite all the time. Also, we believe in something similar to *karma*, that anything you do or do not do will somehow get back to you. Those beliefs, combined with our initial ancient beliefs in dynamism and animism (that make us believe spirits reside in every single object in the world), then lay the foundation in our own horror culture. We are so scared of the things that can haunt us back, that can come every single time we do something wrong, or when we accidentally offend someone – or something. Somehow, this feeling of fear is also represented by the notion of *pamali*; a set of rules that, if violated, can have severe consequence.



Figure 4. The player needs to be careful about how to interact with certain objects in *Pamali*, as they may be breaking taboos © StoryTale.

In *Pamali*, we want to showcase those cultures and beliefs with our game features. You can choose which utterances you want to say, you can choose whether to throw things away or just keep them still, you can mock things, anything you can possibly do to something – we show it. Then, to give the player a *lesson*, we use our dynamic horror engine that will give you hauntings and jumpscare *only* if you do what you

are not supposed to do. We also incorporated many endings to show that you may end up in different states even if you started at the same point of the game. The only thing that matter are your actions and your intentions – and that is what we want to show through *Pamali*.

**Q5: Why do you think video games are a good vehicle to represent and maybe even teach about cultural heritage?**

We actually chose game development as the main field because we think it is one of the best forms of interaction and the future of the interactive medium of content. A video game is a two-way interactive medium – you can choose what you get, and you have to actually do something to be given something else. If you are playing games, you need to do something in them – punching things, finishing puzzles – whereas in films or books, you somehow only take whatever the author is giving you without being able to put some action into it (no offense to films and books! We enjoy them very much, but we need to make a comparison to illustrate our point). By giving the audience/player an opportunity to be involved in the course of the story and the media itself, we believe that they can process the storyline, the environments, basically everything they see better – because they have to understand it all to be able to get immersed and actually play the game. They tend to see themselves as the characters in the gameplay, so they would treat the story and the environments as their own.

**Q6: What does the Indonesian indie video game development scene look like?**

Video game development itself can be considered relatively new in Indonesia. But I believe that it has a lot of potential and it's growing. In the last few years, the government has been supporting as well with various programs, the most noteworthy is an event called *Gameprime*. *Gameprime* is an annual game event where a lot of key figures in the Indonesian game development industry come together. Moreover, there are a lot of game development communities. StoryTale Studios also frequently participates in a game development community in our city, Bandung.

**Q7: What are the objectives, aims or concepts of StoryTale you want to share in gameenvironments?**

We believe that an environment or ecosystem plays a huge role in the game industry itself. And to achieve an adequate ecosystem that can support such a growing industry, it requires a collaboration from three key roles; academia, professionals (individuals), and the industry itself. StoryTale Studios are very passionate in helping to bridge these gaps. We are more than willing to do various collaborations with these key roles, hoping to enrich the ecosystem of the game industry and creative industry in Indonesia.

**Q8: What is your next project about, and when and where can we look out for it?**

We are currently in active development of *Pamali's* third and fourth folklore and we have made plans and concepts for other games. These games will feature various

Indonesian content ranging from folklores, myths to other cultural contents. Since the beginning, StoryTale Studios has been very passionate about bringing Indonesian content to the world via various creative media.

We are also open on developing *Pamali* further; including developing more folklore episodes or creating *Pamali* on another platform. We can not announce anything specific right now, but once we have something concrete we will surely let our community know. You can look out for it on our communication channels like our [twitter](#) or our [discord](#).

## References

*Pamali*, 2018. [video game] (PC), Story Tale Studios, Story Tale Studios and Maple Whispering Limited.