

I-Pop: International Journal of Indonesian Popular Culture and Communication



Vol. 1 (2) pp. 121-129, (2020)
DOI: 10.36782/i-pop.v1i2.58

Representation of Christianity in 'Far Cry 5'

Jusuf Ariz Wahyuono^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Far Cry 5 is a popular game in Indonesia and a 2018 first-person shooter game developed and published by Ubisoft. This game uses many symbols in the Christianity religion. Reading this game is crucial, knowing that Indonesia has one of the largest concentrations of Christianity in the Muslim world. Using text-based semiotic analysis, we observed how this game represents religion utilizing the structure of religious teachings in the Christianity tradition through symbols to depict characters and narrative plots. The study focuses on Joseph Seed's character and its environment. Joseph Seed is described as a Father, has a Bible, is part of a militia group, and a figure who has the qualities of a prophet. In the Storyline, Joseph Seed was shown as the one who receives the revelation, has Prophecy, and makes sacrifices. As Indonesia is a multicultural country, understanding religious representation in the media is essential. There are also fewer studies and concerns in popular media, especially in video games, despite its widely accessible content across Indonesia. This game received commercial success and became the fastest-selling title in the franchise, grossing over \$310 million in its first week of sales.

Keywords

Religious representation, religious symbol, religion, popular game, game studies

To cite this article (7th APA style):

Wahyuono, J. A. (2020). Representation of Christianity in 'Far Cry 5'. *I-Pop: International Journal of Indonesian Popular Culture and Communication*, 1 (2), 121-129. <http://doi.org/10.36782/i-pop.v1i2.58>



Developer: Ubisoft

Publisher: Ubisoft

Writer: Drew Holmes, Dan Hay, Jean-Sebastien Decant

Platform: Microsoft Windows, PlayStation 4, Xbox One

Genre: First Person Shooter (FPS)

particular religion is displayed. Public understanding of religion is closely related to media exposure. If there is no understanding of the context, the depiction of terrorism using a turban can refer to the Islamic religion, which leads to discourse or stigmatization of Islam as a terrorist religion.

It should be understood that symbols are not religiosity. Symbols are outside of reality, like directional signs pointing to a place. The

INTRODUCTION

To show religious elements, a symbol that the community understands as a reference to a

¹Department of Communication, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Jl. Sosio Yustisio, Bulaksumur, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: jusuf.ariz.w@mail.ugm.ac.id

directional symbol is only a 'sign,' not the place to be. The relationship between symbols and signs and the values they contain is read as a cultural code (Syahputra, 2011).

However, in the media industry, religious symbols are presented only as a representation of religion, without including the value or essence of religion. To show that a television show has religious content, it only needs to include religious symbols (Syahputra, 2011). Religion in the media is presented in a way that commodifies religion (Hermawan, 2009).

Far Cry 5 is a first-person shooter game developed by Ubisoft Montreal and Ubisoft Toronto and published by Ubisoft. This game continues the sequel to Far Cry 4 (2014) and the fifth installment of the sequel to the Far Cry game. This game is rated as the most successful sequel to Far Cry because it made a profit of 310 million USD in the one-week gap after its release (Philips, 2018).

Far Cry 5 is about a region in the United States taken over by a doomsday cult at the command of a religious, charismatic, and militaristic leader, Joseph Seed. The player will be playing as a junior deputy sheriff that must work alongside its partners and resistance groups to liberate the region against the despotic rule of the Joseph Seeds and Eden's Gate.

Before its release, this game was controversial. An organization called "Gamers United" posted a petition to "change the antagonist in this game into a Muslim character and change the place in Canada" on the site change.org (Hayes, 2018). Some people think that this game is essential because it reflects the social and political conditions in the United States at that time, which was divided by campaigns that were full of racial and religious sentiments (Rivera, 2017).

There are also many debates and discussions about game content in Far Cry 5. As stated, how far cry 5 become a caricature of Christian or religious cult in America (Sarkar, 2017), a discussion how it spread anti-Christian

theme (Gyroboski, 2017), how the game become apolitical and absurd (Tassi, 2018). As there are many discussions, but it still lacks scientific discussion about the game itself. Through this article, the author tries to explore how religion is represented in this game.

Religion Representation in Games

This article examines how religion is represented within the game and how religious history are used to construct its game world. Hall (2003) stated that representation is the process by which members of a culture use language (broadly defined as any system which deploy signs, any signifying system) to produce meaning. Hall also explained that representation is a process where members of a particular culture use a sign-forming system (language) to produce meaning. In understanding religion in game, religion is understood as a system of signs and symbols defined by members of a particular culture that also related to specific historical and social contexts that convey a special meaning (McCutcheon, 2007).

Video games, as a medium, represent audio-visuals that formed from various signs and symbols. This can be explained in the process of making video games. As a member of a particular culture, game developers form and assemble signs and symbols in a video game. He or she cannot be separated from the process of interpreting the meanings and signs, and symbols that exist in his cultural system environment. As a medium of communication, video games are also tied to their creators' values, code, thoughts, or ideology. This makes the content and message in the game representative (Yuwono & Wahyuono, 2016).

Some studies show how popular games are using religion as a reference. For example, Bosman and Mock (2016) researched Wolfenstein, New Order, and Wolfenstein and found that the game uses many signs and symbols that refer to Judaism and Kabbalah religion. Bosman (2016) also found in the game Assassin Creed the relevance of Old Blood to the Shi'ite sect of the Nizari Isma'ilis. WYsocki

(2018) concluded how BioShock: Infinite vacillates between a biting liberal caricature of religiously fuelled nationalism and a nod to widespread moderate mainstream values in which unusual religious movements are negatively portrayed.

Christianity in Farcry 5

In dissecting Far Cry 5, this article uses the mapping of the game as character and units, background and narrative (Yuwono et al., 2018). It focuses on the main antagonist character, Joseph Seed, and its environment storyline.

Character and Units: Joseph Seed as Messiah and Its Environment



Figure 1. Joseph Seed

Joseph Seed is the main antagonist in Far Cry 5. In the game, he is often shown shirtless with a cross tattoo on his back. His followers 'father

called Joseph Seed'. The word 'father' references a pastor or someone who is believed to have religious knowledge in the Christian religious tradition. Joseph Seed is represented as a man, caucasian, with black hair and a beard.

The cover depiction with Joseph Seed shows that this game is rich in symbols filled with meaning. At a glance, this image bears a resemblance to or takes a reference from Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper". The painting "The Last Supper" is historical and plays a vital role in Catholic, Christian, and Protestant religious traditions. This mural painting is housed in the dining room of the Santa Maria Delle Grazie Convention in Milan. This work was created in 1496 and was ordered to be installed as part of a church renovation. This painting depicts the atmosphere of the Last Supper of Jesus with his apostles, as told in the Gospel of John, 13:21 (Bianchini, 2019).

The character depiction in the game is similar to the last supper painting, especially in the characters' number, position, and gestures. The number of characters sitting on the table at the banquet in the game is 13, the same as the number in the last supper painting. The position of Joseph Seed in the middle with an open hand gesture is the same as the position and gesture of Jesus in the painting. Similar to other characters, positions and gestures can be said to be identical. However, there did appear to be significant differences in the presence of dogs and characters with the backs written "sinner" in the game.



Figure 2. The Farcry 5 Game Cover (Left), and the iconic picture in Christianity Tradition, "Last Supper"

This depiction shows that the game developer wants to show that Joseph Seed is positioned as a messiah, like Jesus. Jesus, also referred to as Jesus of Nazareth or Jesus Christ, was a first-century Jewish preacher and religious leader (Vermes, 1981). He is the central figure of Christianity, the world's largest religion. Most Christians believe he is the incarnation of God the Son and the awaited Messiah (the Christ) prophesied in the Old Testament (Ehrman, 2014).



Figure 3. Joseph Seed preaching while holding his bible, “the book of Joseph”

In addition, the cover game of Far cry 5 shows the antagonist character, Joseph Seed, sitting with open arms among his armed followers, and on the table are books, pistols, drink bottles, meat, fish, and a tablecloth that resembles the American flag. In the blue part above, the flag is a symbol of the cross. The Book before Joseph Seed is mentioned in the narrative as the "Book of Joseph". This Book of Joseph is a record of Joseph Seed's interpretation of the voice of the calling in him,

which he regarded as divine revelation from God. This book is always carried and read by the characters when preaching in front of his followers. This book is the reference for the teachings of Joseph Seed. The function of this book is similar to the understanding in the Christian tradition that it is a collection of God's words that are sacred text that requires interpretation to provide spiritual direction to its adherents. This book is studied and presented at church ceremonies or various other events.

Also on the cover, In front of them was a person bowed down, hands tied, like a punished hostage with his or her back signed the word "sinner". The term "sinner" refers to the divine religious tradition of people who commit acts of violating religious rules. This picture cover seems to show how the sects treated people who violate the religious rules, as he was given a harsh punishment.

Aside from its representation of violence or militia groups, the weaponry in the cover game shows the group has a complete and sophisticated arsenal. Starting from the simple ones like knives, sledgehammers, arrows, revolvers, machine guns, M4A1, grenades to Bazooka. The illustration shows the position of the weapons that are close to each of its members; it also shows the ownership of military capital, indicated by the simplest to the most advanced technological weapon variations. In addition, on the game background cover, there are two planes. In line with the game, players can steal from enemies or buy planes, where this aircraft is also equipped with



Figure 4. Planes that player can steal or buy in Farcry 5, “Carmina” and “The Clusterduck”

complete weaponry, ranging from machine guns, bombs, and rocket shooters.

Story line: Joseph Seed Sacrifice, Violence, Prophecy and Christianity

The history of the revelation received by Joseph Seed is told based on the book "The Book of Joseph". Joseph Seed first heard of the "call" when his father persecuted him for reading Spider-man comics. The second time Joseph Seed heard that voice was after He was beaten. After that, Joseph Seed's family was separated and placed in an orphanage. She lived with several foster families during her teenage years and would find it difficult to establish relationships with her classmates and siblings. Joseph Seed lived the life of a lonely orphan. During this period, the voice of the "call" accompanied and guided Joseph during this period.

Entering adolescence, Joseph Seed began working as a factory worker in his hometown. At this time, Joseph began to be interested in studying religion to understand the "call" or "voice" he often heard. However, Joseph Seed changed jobs frequently and received dismissal for expressing the "call" he received. After that, Joseph Seed worked as a nurse in a mental hospital. While working, Joseph Seed was robbed by three people, and at that moment, the "call" came one last time. This "call" describes the end and the days of judgment for all beings in the world.

Joseph Seed was married and has one child who is still a baby. However, due to an accident, his wife died, and the child survived. In the story, it was this Situation that triggered an essential change in Joseph Seed. When Joseph Seed held the baby, he felt the Lord was testing him. Joseph killed his son by closing the baby's breathing tube. Joseph felt that this calling prompted him to sacrifice his son. This pain and sacrifice are a test to prove that he is a person chosen by God.

Joseph Seed's prophetic imagery is told in the game through the written text in "The Book of Joseph". It is made clear by the narrative

conveyed by various characters in the game, especially Joseph Seed himself. Seed believes that He was chosen by God, coming at the end of the world. The purpose of Joseph Seed is to protect the follower, or "child" from the Last Day, and escort him to "Eden's Gate" or Joseph Seed reference to Heaven. Based on his vision and belief, Joseph Seed formed the Project at Eden's Gate. The Project at Eden's Gate is a doomsday cult and armed terrorist paramilitary group. Locals refer to the cult members as "Peggies", which stands for Project at Eden's Gate.

If concluded from the narrative in the game, Joseph Seed is depicted as a prophet who received a divine revelation that gives a vision about the end of times. This story was written in the Book of the Book, which served as a guide for him and his followers. In addition, Joseph Seed believed that he killed his son to show his loyalty and sacrifice to God.

When referring to the mainstream Christian belief system, divine revelation is the Word of God incarnated in Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, the Bible is believed to be a book written by humans under divine inspiration, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ismail, 2018).

Narratives about the sacrifices made by almost all prophets in religious teachings. For example, in Christian theology, atonement refers to the forgiveness or forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion, which allows atonement between God and creation. Through the crucifixion of Jesus, Christians believe that Jesus is the savior of the world, and through his death, the sins of humans have been forgiven and reconciled to God (Doniger, 2006). This view of penance is related to the sins committed by Adam that violated God's rules and followed the devil's enticements to eat the forbidden fruit. Because of this action, Adam and his descendants bore original sin and were exiled on earth. Christians believe that this sin cannot be atoned for by humankind itself. Through Christianity, God,

through His love, makes redemption by showing Himself through the birth and death of Jesus Christ (Ismail, 2018).

Jewish and Christian sources generally agree that Ishaq was the son Abraham wanted to slaughter. It is stated in the Bible that Allah said to Abraham, "Take your only son, whom you love, Isaac, go to the land of Moriah and offer him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains

was burned down, and there was also a character who was killed by sticking the cross symbol for the teachings of Joseph Seed (Figure 5). In another scene, Joseph Seed is giving a lecture, and one of the participants is caught recording in secret. While saying that he would give eyes to a blind person, the participant was forcefully pulled forward, and Joseph Seed stabbed his eyes in front of the other



Figure 5. The violence and repression in Farcry 5. People in the region were asked to convert at gunpoint (left). The killing of people by Joseph Seed Follower (right)

which I will tell you." (Gen 22:2). However, when he was about to be slaughtered, an angel called to him, and Allah said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." Then God gave a ram as a sacrifice (Gen 22:13).

Inside Edens's gate, Joseph did not hesitate to use force when spreading his teachings. In one scene, Joseph and John's followers come into a house and use violence to get the residents to follow Joseph's beliefs. When one of the characters refused, his house

participants.

Joseph Seed's belief also teaches its followers to confess sins they have committed during their lifetime by 'writing' them on their bodies. The process is by injuring or jabbing a sharp object to write down their sins. This is done to remember what sins they have committed and repent not to do it again. Joseph Seed also practiced this method, as from Joseph Seed's own body there are inscriptions sloth, lust, gluttony, envy, pride, greed, wrath or laziness, lust, greed, envy, arrogance, greed, and anger (Figure 6). These words are related to

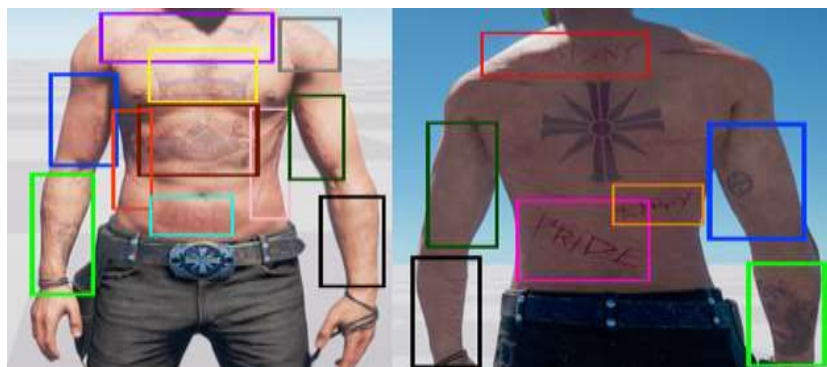


Figure 6. The tattoo and inscriptions in Joseph Seed Body

references from Christian teachings regarding the seven main sins (Gereja Kristen Indonesia, 2007).

The religion formed in the game is based on Joseph Seed's vision and belief at the end of the world, and Joseph Seed is the last savior in the world who was sent to save his people. The depiction of the doomsday in the game can be seen in the final story in the game; when the scene faces Joseph, players will be faced with two plots. First, the player chooses not to

and his followers. When Joseph Seed was defeated and captured, suddenly a nuclear bomb was dropped not far from the place and burned the entire house, and the forest around it, like the Apocalypse that Joseph Seed imagined (Figure 7). The player was asked to escape from the effects of the explosion, although later in the process, the player hits a tree and faints. When awakened, the player is in a bunker with Joseph Seed. Joseph Seed delivered a monologue stating that he was a true apostle, that divine calling was



Figure 7. Joseph Seed and Mushroom Cloud from Nuclear Bomb, or Joseph Seed vision of Apocalypse in the background

capture and leave Joseph Seed and his community. Second, fighting against Joseph Seed.

If you choose the first plot, the player is considered to have accepted Joseph Seed's religious teachings, and he will touch the player's head and ask his followers to release his friends who were held, hostage. However, this choice does not end well. When players leave the village of Eden's Gate, the player's screen will turn red and then black. This was followed by the musical accompaniment used by Joseph Seed to wash the minds of the victims and their followers. The next screen shows that the player is hypnotized and forced to kill his friends.

If the player chooses to follow the second plot, the players will fight against Joseph Seed

true, and that players had become witnesses of the apocalypse.

This picture of the end times is one of the pillars of classical Protestant Christian fundamentalism. As a result of the increasing marginalization of public discourse in the early 20th century, conservative Protestant Christians tried to regroup and find common ground to build solid faith-based communities. At that time, many of these conservatives agreed with the so-called "five pillars of fundamentalism," which are the marks of their beliefs. One of the five fundamentals is the belief in the Coming of Christ on the last day and the second belief in the Day of Judgment. This idea was popularized by Scottish missionary John Nelson Darby, who devoted himself to

interpreting biblical accounts, such as those in the Book of Revelation. Its interpretation profoundly impacts how the end of the world and the coming reign of Jesus Christ are then understood. (New, 2012, p. 109; Weber, 2005, pp. 19–43).

As the apocalypse occurred, this is showing that Joseph Seed's vision of the last day was not merely a prediction but an event that happened. This game is even showing an event that, in reality, people are still debating about the religious prediction of the end of the world. This game is trying to show that Joseph Seed has the quality of a prophet, but his prediction about the end times is accurate. Therefore, he is not a false prophet.

Conclusion

Based on my observation that focuses on Joseph Seed, its environment, and its storyline, Joseph Seed is described as a figure who has the qualities of a prophet, especially in the teachings of Christianity. As in character representation in the cover, it shows Joseph Seed as a father, messiah, has a Bible, and is part of a militia group. In the Storyline, Joseph Seed was shown as the one who received the revelation, has Prophecy, and had to make sacrifices. Even in the game, the player will experience the truth of Joseph Seed's vision and teaching as the apocalypse happened. In addition to that, in his teachings, Joseph Seed uses coercive action and violence to convince and recruit his followers.

This writing shows that this game represents religion using the structure of religious teachings in the Christian tradition through symbols in the depiction of characters and narrative plots. Throughout the game, players will be exposed to several elements such as the qualities of a prophet, prophetic vision, sins, and apocalypse. The additional elements provided are the use of force, violence, and weaponry.

Through playing this game, players are brought to discourse about religion-related to violent practice, about the religion that allowed its followers to use force to recruit other

followers and allowed them to kill people in the name of their religion. Moreover, in reality, it is not rare that practice still exists in the extremist religious movement.

An important point from this game is, will the player not find a statement or argument that says Joseph Seed is a false prophet? Even in the end, the player would find that his vision about doomsday proves the truth about Joseph Seed's vision of the end times. As if, in this game, the developer wants to communicate a message to its player, what if the "true" prophets would go against the narrative of religion as peaceful practices that some of us believe? In addition to that, it also brought a reflective question about humanities and religion for the players who have faith or follow any religion - would you make violence or kill in the name of your belief, prophet, and religion?

References

- Bianchini, R. (2019, November 01). *The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci* – "Santa Maria delle Grazie – Milan". Inexhibit. [[Website](#)]
- Bosman, F. (2016). Nothing is true, everything is permitted - The portrayal of the Nizari Isma'ilis in the Assassin's Creed game series. *Online: Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 10, 6-26. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Bosman, F., and Mock, L., (2016) 'We do not pray, we invent'. Jews, Judaism, and Jewish mysticism in the video game Wolfenstein. The new order. In: A. Houtman, T. Kadari, M. Poorthuis, and V. Tohar (eds.), *Religious stories in transformation. Conflict, revision, and reception*. Brill.
- Doniger, W. (2006). *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religion*. Encyclopedia Britannica
- Ehrman, B. D. (2014). *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*. HarperOne.
- Far Cry 5 (2018). PS4 version. Ubisoft Games. [Video game].
- Gyroboski, M. (2017, May 26). *Anti-Christian or Anti-Cult? 'Far Cry 5' Features Gun-Toting Pastor Fighting Montana Cultists*. Christian Post. [[OnlineMedia](#)]
- Gereja Kristen Indonesia. (2007). *Tujuh dosa yang mematikan* [Seven deadly sins]. GKIP. [[Website](#)]
- Hall, S. (2003). *Race, the Floating Signifier*. Media Education Foundation. [[GoogleScholar](#)]

- Hayes, M. (2018, May 11). *Petition Calls for Ubisoft to Change Far Cry 5 Villains to Muslims or Change Setting to Canada*. ComicBook. [Website]
- Hermawan, A. (2009). Spiritualisme Televisi: Antara Aqidah dan Komodifikasi. *Jurnal Dakwah*, 10(1), 33-52. [GoogleScholar]
- Ismail, R. (2018). Konsep Wahyu Menurut Saksi-Saksi Yehuwa. *Journal Religi UIN SUKA* 14(1), 1-21. [CrossRef]
- Lucile (2018). *Joseph's tattoos and scars*. Tumblr. [Website]
- McCutcheon, R. T. (2007). *Studying Religion. An Introduction*. Equinox.
- New, D. S. (2012). *Christian Fundamentalism in America. A Cultural History*. McFarland
- Philips, T. (2018, April 3). Far Cry 5 tops UK chart with the biggest launch in series' history. Eurogamer. [Website]
- Syahputra, I. (2011) *Rahasia Simulasi Mistik Televisi*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Sarkar, S. (2017, May 24). *Far Cry 5 artwork introduces us to a religious cult (update)*. Polygon. [OnlineMedia]
- Tassi, P. (2018, March 27). 'Far Cry 5' Is Apolitical To The Point Of Absurdity. Forbes. [OnlineMedia]
- University of Montreal. (2010, April 1). *Leonardo Da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' reveals more secrets*. ScienceDaily. [OnlineMedia]
- Vermes, G. (1981). *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels*. First Fortress.
- Weber, T. P. (2005). *On the Road to Armageddon. How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*. Baker Academic.
- Wysocki, J. (2018). Critique with Limits—The Construction of American Religion in BioShock: Infinite. *Religions*, 9(5), 150. [CrossRef]
- Yuwono, A. I and Wahyuono, J. A. (2016). Multikulturalisme dalam Video Game Dragon Age: Inquisition. *Ettisal Journal of Communication*, 1(2), 151-187. [CrossRef].
- Yuwono, A. I., Simatupang, G. R. L. L. & Salam, A. (2018). Pewujudan dan penyerapan Pemain dalam Video Game [Embodiment and Immersion of Players in the Game Video]. *Journal Communication Spectrum: Capturing New Perspectives in Communication*, 8(1), 94-112. [CrossRef]

Notes on Authors

Jusuf Ariz Wahyuono is a lecturer at the Communication Science Department, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). He received his master's degree from the Communication Science Department, UGM. His research interest is in game studies, cultural studies, and the political economy of communication. Jusuf is also working as secretary editor for *Jurnal Media dan Komunikasi Indonesia (JMKI)*. Email: jusuf.ariz.w@mail.ugm.ac.id.