

Visual Structure Construction Of Mahabharata Series Illustrated Stories By Herjaka In Postmodern Perspective

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Abstract

Picture stories are known as popular culture because of their mass production. In the view of modern art, picture stories are categorized as low-class work. However, with the presence of the literary heritage of the Mahabharata story in puppets, Herjaka's Mahabharata series becomes a paradox because the low-class and high-class cultures merge into one. This study aims to describe the construction of the visual structure of the Mahabharata series as a postmodern culture. This research method uses a qualitative design with data analysis using visual communication design theory, postmodern theory, representation theory, and hermeneutic theory. The results show that the construction of the visual structure of the Mahabharata series by Herjaka consists of modern and traditional visual appearances. This literary work is a postmodern cultural work because the fusion of boundaries between traditional and modern cultures and the loss of boundaries between literary heritage and popular culture marks it. The picture stories in the Mahabharata series show the birth of the re-creation of the picture stories and the presence of culture as a struggle for meaning in postmodern culture.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Mahabharata, Picture stories, Postmodern, Visual structure.

Abstrak

Cergam atau cerita bergambar dikenal sebagai budaya populer karena produksinya yang bersifat massal. Dalam pandangan seni modern, cergam dikategorikan sebagai karya kelas rendah. Namun dengan hadirnya cerita adiluhung Mahabharata dengan rupa wayang, cergam seri Mahabharata karya Herjaka menjadi paradoks karena budaya kelas rendah dan kelas tinggi melebur menjadi satu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan konstruksi struktur visual cergam seri Mahabharata sebagai budaya postmodern. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan rancangan kualitatif dengan analisis data menggunakan teori desain komunikasi visual, teori postmodern, teori representasi, dan teori hermeneutika. Hasilnya menunjukkan konstruksi struktur visual cergam seri Mahabharata karya cergamis Herjaka terdiri dari tampilan visual modern dan tradisi. Cergam ini menjadi karya budaya postmodern karena ditandai dengan meleburnya batas-batas antara budaya tradisional dengan budaya modern, dan hilangnya batas antara budaya adiluhung dengan budaya populer. Cergam seri Mahabharata ini menunjukkan lahirnya re-kreasi cergam dan hadirnya kebudayaan sebagai perjuangan makna dalam budaya postmodern.

Kata Kunci: Identitas Budaya, Mahabharata, Cerita bergambar, Posmodern, Struktur visual

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1. INTRODUCTION

An illustrated story is a visual communication design work that is typically employed to convey narratives to children. As a product of popular culture, an illustrated story serves not only as a medium for storytelling to children, but also to the general public. The narratives conveyed through illustrated stories are diverse, encompassing genres such as fairy tales, historical accounts, and puppet stories. An illustrated story is designated as a work of popular culture due to its mass production and dissemination. The advent of modern digital printing technologies has enabled the mass production and dissemination of illustrated story works, allowing them to be reproduced in high quantities and disseminated worldwide. However, from a contemporary standpoint, an illustrated story is often pejoratively referred to as “low-class culture”, a term that is emblematic of the marginalization of popular culture within the broader cultural landscape.

Meanwhile, the Mahabharata narrative in *wayang* performances is recognized as a refined or “high” form of culture. Originating from India, this narrative has been adapted into various Indonesian art forms, such as *sendratari* (dance drama), *wayang orang* (human theater), and *wayang kulit* (leather shadow puppetry) [1]. In the specific context of *wayang* film, the characters that embody the Mahabharata are depicted as symbolic figures, eschewing the depiction of anatomically realistic human forms. Instead, these characters are portrayed through the use of traditional regional symbols, akin to those found in Javanese *wayang* [2].

The epic narrative of the Mahabharata, typically presented in the context of *wayang kulit* performances, is available for further exploration through Herjaka’s illustrated rendition. The illustrated narrative offers a compelling subject for academic inquiry due to its unique integration of two distinct cultural forms: illustrated stories, often considered a manifestation of mass culture and thus typically associated with the lower social classes, and puppetry, regarded as a hallmark of high culture. The illustrated story of puppetry serves as a remarkable point of convergence, where the realms of low and high culture intersect [32].

A substantial corpus of research on illustrated stories has been amassed by scholars in various disciplines. For instance, Hanisha’s study, “*Bahasa Visual, Gambar Anak, dan Ilustrasi pada Buku Cerita bergambar Anak*” (2018), employs a visual approach to demonstrate a correlation between children’s visual language and illustrated stories. This study also reveals that developmental stages align with the periodization of children’s visual growth [3].

A subsequent study was conducted by Gunawan in his article, “*Gerakan ‘Tjergam Medan’ dalam Wacana Kepribadian Nasional*” (2021), which draws upon Foucault’s theoretical framework. The study demonstrates that several comic artists from Medan—such as Taguan Hardjo—show that the value of an illustrated story is not necessarily confined to an Indonesian cultural context. Taguan Hardjo’s oeuvre predominantly features themes and subjects devoid of local or Nusantara cultural elements, instead relying on purely modern, imaginative ideas. Conversely, the comic artist Zam Nuldyn produces numerous illustrated stories rooted in folk narratives or his own locally infused creations, occasionally merging historical facts with futuristic imaginings. These findings suggest that cultural debates persist within the domain of illustrated stories. The evolving nature of the ‘personality’ of illustrated stories is shaped by diverse cultural forces and dominant cultural regulators in Indonesia. Gunawan’s study specifically examines Medan-based comics [4].

Hanisha and Gunawan’s studies are relevant to the present study in that both discuss visual culture. However, the present one clearly differs from those two previous works in three ways. First, this research explicitly focuses on illustrated stories rather than pictorial narratives or comics as examined by Gunawan. Second, this study positions illustrated stories as an arena of contestation between two cultural categories—“low culture” and “high culture”—highlighted by the incorporation of *wayang* imagery. Third, it explores the visual structure of illustrated stories using design theory and examines Herjaka’s illustrated stories from a postmodern perspective. This approach is distinctly different from Hanisha’s study, which analyzes children’s drawings and their

correlation with illustrated stories, as well as from Gunawan's study, which specifically focuses on Medan comics.

This study bears similarities to previous studies in this field. However, the present study will delve deeper by exploring the position of Herjaka's Mahabharata series picture stories from a postmodern perspective. The study will proceed through several stages of analysis. Initially, the structure of the illustrated story will be examined, encompassing elements such as illustrations, typography, layout, and color. The construction of the picture story structure will be described in detail, followed by a discussion that employs a postmodern perspective [5]. The study further explores the implications of the illustrated story works, particularly in the context of presenting stories and puppetry icons.

This research discusses how the visual structure construction of the Mahabharata Herjaka short story can be understood from a postmodern perspective?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a qualitative design, a research procedure that yields descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people, as well as observable behaviors [6]. The primary data source for this research consists of Herjaka's Mahabharata illustrated story series: *Kesetiaan Dewabrata*, *Anugerah Dewata*, *Dendam Dewi Gendari*, *Dosa Pandu Dewanata*, and *Seratus Bayi Tumpuan Dendam*. Secondary data were gathered through literature reviews and documentation.

This study adopts a deductive reasoning method for data analysis. Deductive reasoning, also referred to as deductive logic, is the process of deriving a logical conclusion from one or more premises [6]. In this research, data analysis involves applying the previously formulated theoretical frameworks, which include: (1) the text's visual forms in illustrated stories are examined through the lens of visual communication design theory; (2) postmodern cultural analysis is conducted using postmodern theory and representation theory; and (3) the implications of the Mahabharata illustrated

story series are explored by employing hermeneutic theory [7].

Visual Communication Design (VCD) theory integrates design principles with communication theory to create effective messaging through visual elements. Such elements include illustration, typography, color, and layout. VCD takes into account cultural influences and symbols, which may carry diverse meanings across different contexts. Its primary emphasis is on producing messages that are not only aesthetically appealing, but also effective in conveying information and influencing audience behavior [8] [9] [10].

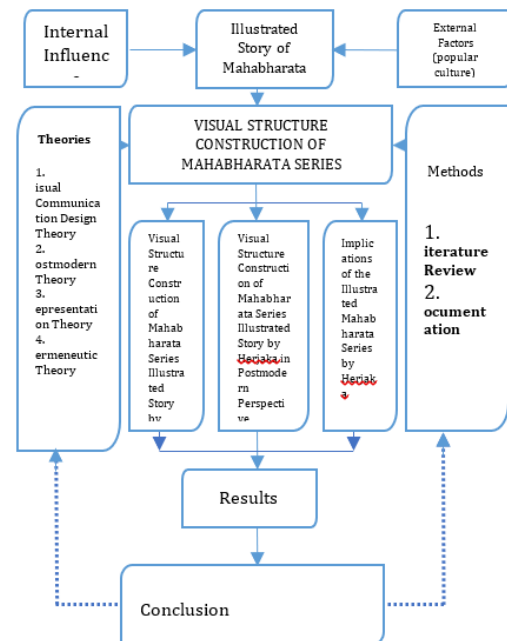
Postmodern theory, an approach that has emerged in various disciplines, including art, architecture, literature, and philosophy, during the mid-to-late 20th century, has been associated with the philosophical concepts of deconstruction, as exemplified by Derrida's work. Postmodern theory encourages readers to critically examine the underlying structures and assumptions of texts and ideas, a concept that is particularly relevant in the fields of art and literature. Postmodernism in these disciplines often involves the combination of different genres and styles, resulting in works that reflect uncertainty and complexity. Additionally, postmodern theory explores how identity is shaped by social and cultural factors. Postmodernists regard identity not as immutable, but rather as a perpetually evolving construct. Paradoxically, postmodernism aims to legitimate culture (both sacred and popular) while simultaneously subverting it [11] [12].

Representation theory, a concept in communication, culture, and media studies, concerns itself with the manner in which reality is represented through various forms of media, including images, texts, and symbols. In essence, representation signifies the means by which meaning is communicated through media. The term "representation", as defined by Piliang, refers to the manner in which a particular person, group, idea, or opinion is presented in a text. This concept encompasses the depiction of ideas, people, events, and cultures in visual, verbal, or symbolic forms, emphasizing the influence of cultural and social context on the

interpretation of these representations. Consequently, what is considered representative in one culture may not be in another, thereby creating the possibility of multiple interpretations and meanings. In essence, representation theory underscores the influence of media representation on our understanding of the world, emphasizing the significance of critical analysis in the study of culture and communication [13] [7] [12].

Hermeneutic theory, an approach in the humanities, concerns itself with the interpretation and understanding of texts [14]. The term “hermeneutics” originates from the Greek word “hermeneuein,” signifying “to interpret” or “to articulate”. The theoretical framework under scrutiny herein emphasizes the process of interpreting and understanding the meaning embedded within a text or work. It is imperative to note that the meaning of a text cannot be extracted directly, but rather must be interpreted. Interpretation is an interactive process involving the reader, the text, and the historical and cultural context in which it appears. Ricoeur’s integration of hermeneutics with phenomenology underscores the significance of narrative in shaping our understanding of human experience. Additionally, he explores the relationship between text and reality. In sum, hermeneutics provides a framework for comprehending how meaning is shaped and interpreted, emphasizing the role of context in the interpretive process. A text’s meaning is not confined to its immediate context; it also alludes to meanings beyond itself, that is, to our lives, to the world [15] [16].

Research Model



3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion examines the visual structure of the illustrated narrative using visual communication design theory, which encompasses visual text (illustrations), verbal text (typography/lettering), color, and layout. Once the visual structure is described, Herjaka’s Mahabharata comic series—treated as a postmodern work—is analyzed using postmodern theory and representation theory, while its implications are explored through hermeneutic theory. The unit of analysis consists of the illustrated narrative’s data, including verbal text, visual text, and the underlying postmodern discourse.

The five-part Mahabharata narrative in the form of illustrated stories by Herjaka does not recount the Mahabharata until its conventional conclusion—namely, the Pandawa Seda or the Pandavas’ journey to heaven [17]. The five illustrated stories (Figure 1) examined in this study only extend to the birth of Gendari’s children. Despite ending with the fifth installment, the constructed visual structure of these illustrated stories successfully represents the Mahabharata narrative as a whole.

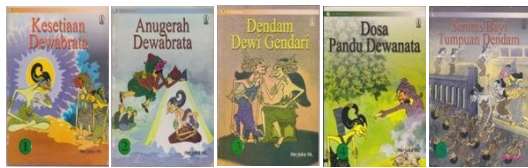


Figure 1. The cover of Herjaka's Mahabharata illustrated series
Source: Herjaka (2005)

1.1. Visual Structure of the Illustrated Story

The visual structure of the illustrated story is heavily influenced by its underlying narrative. The following describes each installment in Herjaka's Mahabharata series. The first illustrated installment, entitled *Kesetiaan Dewabrata* (Figure 2), tells the story of Dewabrata, the son of King (Prabu) Sentanu, who was married to Dewi Ganggawati. After his mother (Dewi Ganggawati) left, Dewabrata was raised by his father (Prabu Sentanu). Dewabrata was born a noble and intelligent child, adept in warfare and governance, and he was prepared to succeed Sentanu as king. Sentanu's efforts to train his son as the heir to the throne proceeded smoothly, ensuring that Dewabrata would become the next ruler of the Astina kingdom. However, everything changed when Sentanu met a young woman named Setyawati. Sentanu wished to marry Setyawati, who, in turn, demanded that her future son—rather than Dewabrata—inherit the throne of Astina. For the sake of his father's happiness, Dewabrata vowed to relinquish the throne to Setyawati's future son and took an oath never to marry or have descendants.



Figure 2. "Kesetiaan Dewabrata", an illustrated story by Herjaka
Source: Herjaka (2005)

The second illustrated story, *Anugerah Dewabrata* (Figure 3), narrates Dewabrata's sincerity in safeguarding Astina and his willingness to give up the throne to his younger brothers, Wicitragada and Wicitrawirya. Even after both younger brothers passed away—fulfilling Dewi Setyawati's desire for her own sons to become kings—Dewabrata still chose not to claim the throne. Moved by Dewabrata's noble heart, the heavens bestowed upon him three gifts through Sang Hyang Narada: he was elevated to the status of a holy sage, granted unrivaled supernatural powers ensuring he would never be defeated in battle, and given longevity, enabling him to choose the day of his own death.



Figure 3. "Anugerah Dewabrata", an illustrated story by Herjaka
Source: Herjaka (2005)

The third illustrated story, *Dendam Dewi Gendari* (Figure 4), narrates the victory of Setyawati's grandson, Pandu, in a contest for the hands of three princesses: Dewi Gendari, Dewi Prita, and Dewi Madrim. This victory granted Pandu the right to marry all three. However, Pandu gave one of them to his elder brother, Destarastra, who was blind. Destarastra chose Gendari as his wife. In truth, Gendari only loved Pandu, so upon being given to Destarastra, she developed anger, disappointment, and resentment toward Pandu—feelings that persisted into the next generation.



Figure 4. "Dendam Dewi Gendari", an illustrated story by Herjaka
Source: Herjaka (2005)

The fourth illustrated story, entitled "*Dosa Pandu Dewanata*" (Figure 5), chronicles the splendor of the Astinapura kingdom under the reign of King Pandu, also known as Prabu Pandu Dewanata. During his rule, Pandu was reputed to partake in hunting expeditions in the forest to refine his archery proficiency. On one such occasion, while engaged in this pursuit, Pandu inadvertently shot a deer engaged in a romantic act with its partner. The deer, it transpired, was the reincarnation of a rishi named Resi Kimindama. Pandu's actions, in shooting the deer, which was in a state of amorous union, were deemed grave. For this transgression, King Pandu was subjected to a curse by the rishi. The curse, inscribed by the rishi, read as follows: "Because of your actions, you deserve a curse. Remember, Pandu, you will perish while you are in love with your wife" [18].



Figure 5. "*Dosa Pandu Dewanata*", an illustrated story by Herjaka
Source: Herjaka (2005)

The fifth illustrated story, titled "*Seratus Bayi Tumpuan Dendam*" (Figure 6), focuses on Dewi Gendari's feelings of envy and resentment upon learning that King (Prabu) Pandu has already fathered children. Gendari's envy stems from her desire for her own offspring to become the next ruler of Astinapura. Determined to surpass

Pandu's children and seize the throne, she aspires to bear numerous heirs. However, her hope wanes when she delivers a lump of flesh rather than an infant. With the assistance of Dewi Durga, the goddess of darkness, this lump of flesh is metamorphosed into one hundred infants. Gendari believes that these one hundred children will serve as the instruments of her revenge against King Pandu Dewanata.

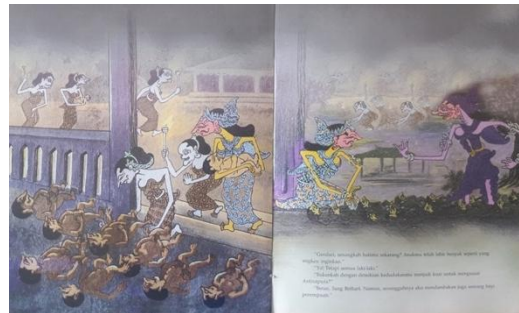


Figure 6. "*Seratus Bayi Tumpuan Dendam*", an illustrated story by Herjaka
Source: Herjaka (2005)

An illustrated story is defined as a narrative whose plot is clarified by the presence of images, which function as illustrations that reinforce the constructed storyline. Readers can engage with the text and images in a sequential manner, with the illustrations facilitating observation and experience of events through characters' expressions, the surrounding environment, or the atmosphere conveyed in the story. The visual structure of Herjaka's Mahabharata illustrated series consists of four elements of visual communication design: illustration, typography, color, and layout.

The term "illustrate" is formed from the functional separation between text and image. The term "illustrate" is derived from the Latin word *lustrate*, which means "to purify" or "to illuminate". Illustration is a specialized domain of art that employs images, whether as representations or expressions, to convey a visual statement [19]. Illustration can take the form of graphics, animations, drawings, or paintings. The pivotal role of illustration in design, particularly in the context of print design, cannot be overstated.

Illustrations in Herjaka's Mahabharata comic series depict characters from the Mahabharata narrative, employing a *wayang*-inspired style characterized by flattened forms and static poses. The anatomical depictions in these illustrations are highly symbolic, serving to clarify the narrative conveyed through verbal text or script. The illustrated figures can be categorized into two distinct types: those adorned in elaborate, ornamented attire, and those whose attire is minimal or entirely devoid of ornamentation. It is noteworthy that both male and female figures fall into the latter category (see Figure 7). A critical observation is that the placement of each character is meticulously adapted to the specific narrative context. This adaptation may place them in outdoor settings, such as forested areas, riverside settings, battle arenas, or along roads. Alternatively, characters may be situated in indoor environments, such as palaces or chambers.



Figure 7. Characters with ornamented attire (left) and characters without ornamentation (right)

Source: Herjaka (2005)

Letters constitute the smallest unit of written language and serve as the fundamental building blocks of words or sentences. The arrangement of letters in a word or sentence not only conveys a meaning related to an object or idea, but also has the capacity to project a visual impression or image. Letters thus combine both functional and aesthetic values. Knowledge of letters can be studied within a branch of art known as typography [20]. In Herjaka's Mahabharata comic series, text functions as an explanatory element that guides readers through the storyline. The text employs serif fonts, which feature small "feet" or strokes attached to the ends of letters. Such fonts are commonly used in lengthy texts with the aim of leading the reader's eye along lines of text without confusion, ensuring a coherent reading

experience. Consequently, the text can be followed in a structured manner (see Figure 8).

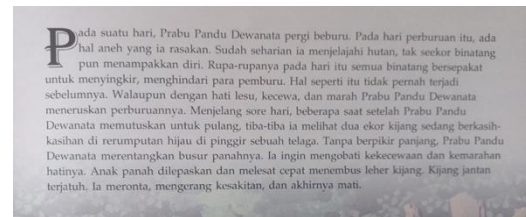


Figure 8. Typefaces in Herjaka's Mahabharata Illustrated Series

Source: Herjaka (2005)

Color is a vital element in design. As Danesi points out, the ability to perceive color in various forms underlies numerous sign-making activities worldwide [21] [22]. Color serves as a visual sign that naturally draws attention, especially when certain hues are deliberately encoded with meaning. In Herjaka's Mahabharata illustrated series, bright, popular colors dominate both the figures/characters and their surrounding environments. These include red, yellow, orange, purple, and greenish-yellow. The *wayang* figures themselves do not employ extensive color gradients, making them appear strikingly bold to the reader. By using such vivid tones, the characters become the primary focal point within each composition (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Bright colors in Herjaka's Mahabharata illustrated series
Source: Herjaka (2005)

Rustan (2009) defines layout as the arrangement of design elements within a particular space or medium to support the concept or message being conveyed. The visible layout we see today is the outcome of an ongoing process of creative exploration from the past. A layout consists of numerous elements, each playing a distinct role in constructing the overall composition. According to Rustan, these layout elements can be grouped into three categories: text elements, visual elements, and invisible elements.

frameworks mapped out by Althusser and Gramsci [24]. Modernity and postmodernity have since shifted far beyond the academic realms of media and cultural studies. The term "postmodern" is so laden with inquiry that it has proven not only appropriate but necessary to integrate postmodernism as a cultural movement—one that originated from its severance from modernism. This rupture has visibly shifted the focus from linearity and stylistic pluralism toward postmodernism as a condition marked by a convergence at the 'crisis of representation' in art.

Postmodern culture is distinguished by the dissolution and convergence of conventional boundaries between culture and art, low and high culture, commerce and art, culture, and

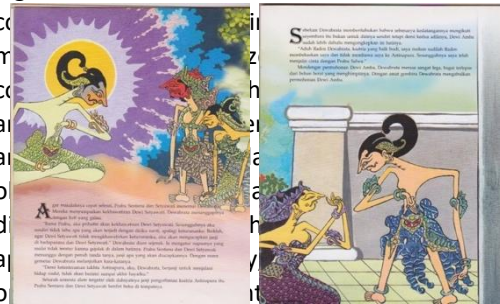


Figure 10. Layout of Herjaka's Mahabharata Illustrated Series
Source: Herjaka (2005)

The text elements created in the layout of the illustrated story are not fixed in one position, meaning that they can be placed below or above the visual elements. Text elements are sometimes balanced with visual elements in occupying image space, but at other times, text elements are dominated by visual elements. Invisible elements in picture stories use equal balance, which is achieved by ensuring that the left and right parts of the picture are balanced, even though the shape is not symmetrical.

theory and traditional philosophy [26]. Herjaka's Mahabharata illustrated series is a prime example of a postmodern work, characterized by the dissolution of the conventional boundaries between high culture and popular culture, a hallmark of postmodernism.

Herjaka's Mahabharata series illustrated stories are characterized by the incorporation of textual collages and mixtures that serve to blur boundaries between traditional and modern cultural representations. This is achieved through a bricolage technique, which can be likened to a mosaic. The term "bricolage" refers to the reconfiguration and combination of previously unconnected signs, resulting in the creation of new codes of meaning. This approach is emblematic of a core element of postmodern culture, namely the utilization of bricolage as a stylistic device. This approach is evident in Herjaka's illustrated narrative work, as illustrated in Figure 11.

1.2. Mahabharata Series Illustrated Story from a Postmodern Perspective

Over recent years, cultural studies have undergone dramatic transformations [23]. Questions of modernity and postmodernity have supplanted long-standing concepts like ideology and hegemony—which, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, firmly anchored cultural analysis within the neo-Marxist

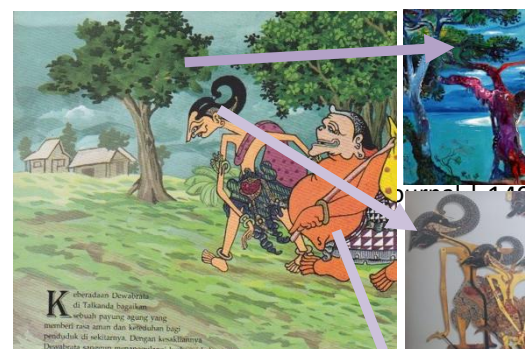


Figure 11. Representation of Modern and Traditional Art
in Herjaka's Mahabharata Illustrated Series
Source: Herjaka (2005)

The pages of the illustrated story exhibit representations of two distinct cultural traditions: modern culture, exemplified by modern painting, and traditional culture, symbolized by *wayang*. This representation is discernible in the division of the background, which functions as a representation of modern culture, and the incorporation of shadow puppets as characters in the narrative of the Mahabharata. The exploration of local cultural values, as embodied by puppet characters and the narratives of the Mahabharata, is a hallmark of traditional culture. In contrast, modern art is characterized by a firm aspiration to present novelty, often defined by the novel or the divergent from traditional art. The term "modernity" is generally applied to the historical period following the Middle Ages. It is a post-traditional order characterized by change, innovation, and dynamism [25] [27].

Postmodern culture is present to place traditional art back in the present or modernity. Postmodernism has been characterized by a shift towards reflexivity, marked by a departure from the certainties and stagnancy often associated with traditional religious and cultural beliefs. In modernity, life is perceived as an ever-evolving series of choices, often made without a solid foundation. This shift has encouraged a greater emphasis on self-reflection and the development of unique identities. Furthermore, reflexivity serves as a catalyst for the comparison of the traditions of *wayang* culture

in Herjaka's Mahabharata series of picture stories with other modern cultures, such as the popular culture of picture story expression. Consequently, postmodern culture encompasses the Other of modernity, representing voices that have historically been silenced by the modern pursuit to eradicate differences and to articulate [11] [28].

The term "popular culture" is often used to describe illustrated stories that are printed multiple times and consumed by large audiences. However, within the context of their mass production, these illustrated stories also serve as a form of noble culture. Specifically, the puppet figures in shadow puppets are typically colored in classical tones. However, in these picture stories, the colors of the characters' puppets are often bright or pop colors, reflecting a shift from classical tones. This blurring of boundaries between the form of the illustrated story and the visualization of the characters in Herjaka's Mahabharata series is referred to as a postmodern cultural product.

As consumers of postmodern art, society enters into the legitimization of "new culture". Postmodern art overtly examines the critical possibilities open to art, without ignoring the fact that its critique cannot but be done in the name of its own contradictory ideology. In this case, the political and artistic aspects cannot be separated [1].

1.3. Implications of Herjaka's Mahabharata Illustrated Series

Herjaka's illustrated series has undergone a visual re-creation within the comic narrative format. There is a negotiation of visual style against the hegemony of modern art styles. While the visual background can still be categorized as modern art, the depiction of characters refers to traditional *wayang kulit*. The *wayang kulit* performances based on the Mahabharata serve as a reference for Herjaka's comics in visualizing the Mahabharata narrative series. *Wayang kulit* drama is known as a traditional and local Javanese/Indonesian culture. Although Herjaka's illustrated Mahabharata series—rooted in *wayang* traditions—represents a minority within the local-traditional *wayang* culture, it paradoxically

became part of the phenomenon of new mass media at the time. Its use of the Indonesian language allowed it to reach and be recognized by younger generations.

Herjaka adapted the Mahabharata into an illustrated narrative—a form of “popular art storytelling”—while incorporating a visual background characteristic of modern art development. The anatomical depiction of characters follows a two-dimensional presentation. This signifier indicates that Herjaka still regards his figures as akin to *wayang kulit* puppets on stage, the traditional medium for *wayang* performances [27]. The visual presentation from a single-object perspective demonstrates that Herjaka traditionally perceives these *wayang* characters as figures from *wayang kulit* performances—a hallmark of Javanese/Indonesian culture. Herjaka maintains this traditional perspective in his portrayal.

Herjaka’s illustrated narrative is a cultural artifact. Understanding that culture constitutes the arena for struggles over meaning—a space where subordinate groups strive to resist the imposition of meanings that serve the interests of dominant groups, whose discourses dominate the cultural sphere—renders culture inherently ideological. Based on this premise, the epic *Mahabharata* illustrated series serves as a representation of culture itself, acting as the battleground for ideological struggles in the construction of postmodern cultural identity [29]. Indonesian identity emerges as a negotiation between Indonesian culture (as embodied by *wayang*) and popular culture (as represented by illustrated storytelling), a topic that has long been unexplored or neglected. In short, this study also finds that the hegemony of any dominant discourse is a state that is perpetually subject to ongoing negotiation [30] [31].

4. CONCLUSION

Herjaka’s Mahabarata series illustrated story constitutes a fusion of modern and traditional art. The artwork’s structure features the depiction of characters from the illustrated story in the form of traditional *wayang kalit*, characterized by their flat shape and use of

dominant colors. The visual background of the work is depicted with modern art strokes. The verbal text placed at the top or bottom of the illustration utilizes a serif typeface. The layout of the work exhibits equal balance.

The fusion of modern art culture with traditional art in Herjaka’s Mahabharata illustrated series positions this work as a postmodern creation, reflecting significant cultural changes in contemporary life and depicting a postmodern period that serves as a transitional phase shaping an ever-evolving future landscape. Postmodern culture is marked by the blurring and collapse of traditional boundaries between high and low culture, and the construction of this illustrated work presents a struggle of meanings and a clash between high culture and low culture. The visual structure of Herjaka’s Mahabharata series manifests as a “new language” in the domain of visual communication design, signifying that this culture is in a continuous process of evolution.

Recommendations for further research include comparing the study with other comic strips that embody local cultural values. The theory used could also be developed, such as using Bourdieu’s theory, to reflect the context and resources of comic strips artists.

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