

Negotiating Historical Agency in Indonesian Comics: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Herman Johannes in Komando Rajawali

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Abstract

Keywords

multimodal discourse, comics studies, visual narrative, cultural memory, Indonesian history

Comics have increasingly been recognized as multimodal cultural texts that combine visual and verbal elements to construct narrative meaning and ideological perspectives. Within historical comics, character representation plays an important role in shaping how historical actors and events are interpreted by audiences. However, studies examining how visual and verbal elements jointly articulate ideological meanings through character representation remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of Indonesian historical comics. This study aims to examine how the character Herman Johannes is represented in the comic Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle and how this representation contributes to the reinterpretation of historical narratives about the Indonesian independence struggle. Using a qualitative approach based on Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), the study analyzes selected comic panels that depict Herman Johannes through the interaction of dialogue, visual composition, symbolic objects, and character gestures. The analysis reveals that the character is constructed as a civilian scientist whose intellectual expertise function as an alternative form of strategic contribution within the struggle of independence narrative. Visual elements such as books, spatial positioning, and gesture symbolism work together with verbal dialogue to redefine knowledge as a form of power alongside military action. These findings highlight the role of comics as cultural media capable of negotiating dominant historical narratives and expanding the representation of historical agency beyond military-centered perspectives in Indonesian independence discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Comics have increasingly been recognized as significant cultural texts that extend beyond entertainment to function as complex multimodal narrative media. Combining visual imagery, written language, and spatial organization within sequential panels, comics enable the communication of layered meanings that shape how narratives, identities, and social relations are interpreted (Peterle, 2021). Scholars in multimodal communication and visual culture argue that meaning in contemporary media emerges through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources, including images, language, layout, and symbolic objects, that work together to construct social and cultural representations (Kress, 2010; Ledin & Machin, 2020). Within this perspective, comics operate not merely as illustrated stories but as multimodal discursive

spaces in which social realities, historical narratives, and ideological positions are visually articulated.

Because of their multimodal structure, comics have also become important cultural media for representing historical events and collective memory (Mickwitz, 2016; Nedzinskaitė-Mitkė, 2026; Twark, 2017). Scholars of visual culture have noted that graphic narratives frequently function as forms of historical interpretation, shaping how societies remember and understand past events (Chute, 2016). Through the interaction of visual representation, narrative dialogue, and symbolic imagery, comics are able to present historical narratives not merely as factual accounts but as interpretive constructions that frame particular actors, perspectives, and value (Mickwitz, 2016; Peterle, 2021; Stein & Thon, 2015). In this way, comics participate in broader processes of historical meaning-making, where visual storytelling contributes to the formation of public memory and cultural understandings of the past (Sitzia & Gramond, 2026).

In the Indonesian context, comics have also played an important role in narrating historical events related to national identity and the struggle for independence. Since the early development of the Indonesian comic industry, stories depicting the resistance against colonial rule have occupied a prominent position in popular graphic narratives. These works are often referred to in Indonesia as *komik perjuangan* (literally “struggle comics”), a genre of historical comics that depicts heroic resistance against colonial forces during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949) (Ajidarma, 2021). Within these narratives, visual storytelling frequently foregrounds scenes of armed conflict, military leadership, and battlefield heroism as central elements in the construction of national history.

Such representations reflect broader historiographical patterns in the way the Indonesian independence struggle has been narrated in public discourse. For several decades, narratives of the Indonesian War of Independence were strongly associated with the role of military leadership in shaping the nation’s liberation. During the New Order regime (1966–1998), official historiography and state-sponsored cultural productions frequently emphasized the central role of the military as the primary agent of national history. This narrative framework influenced not only historical writing but also various forms of popular cultural representation, including film, literature, and comics (Putra, 2017). Consequently, contributions from non-military actors, such as scientists, intellectuals, and civilian strategists, often received comparatively limited attention within mainstream representations of the independence movement.

The political transformation following the fall of the New Order regime in 1998 opened new possibilities for revisiting and reinterpreting historical narratives. In the Reformasi era, public discourse increasingly accommodates alternative perspectives on national history that highlight previously marginalized actors and overlooked contributions within the independence struggle (Dibley & Ford, 2019). Cultural media, including comics, have become important spaces where these alternative interpretations of history can be articulated and negotiated through visual storytelling.

Within this context, the comic series *Komando Rajawali* (2015) offers a particularly compelling case for examining how historical narratives are constructed and articulated through multimodal visual storytelling. Rather than functioning merely as illustrated accounts of past events, comics organize historical meaning through the interaction of visual imagery,

narrative dialogue, and character representation. The series revisits the historical event known as the General Offensive of 1 March 1949 in Yogyakarta, a coordinated Indonesian military operation during the Indonesian War of Independence that sought to demonstrate the continued existence and resilience of the Republic of Indonesia to the international community. Widely regarded as a pivotal moment in the struggle against the re-establishment of Dutch colonial rule, the event has long occupied a prominent place within Indonesian national memory. While the comic retains many elements typical of historical comics about the independence struggle, such as depictions of military strategy, armed resistance, and battlefield operations, it also introduces a character who diverges from the conventional portrayal of heroic soldiers: Herman Johannes. Historically known as a physicist and academic who contributed technical expertise to the Indonesian resistance, Herman Johannes represents a civilian intellectual operating within a narrative environment that is largely dominated by military actors.

The presence of this character raises important questions about how alternative forms of contribution to the independence struggle are represented within visual narratives. Characters in comics function not only as narrative devices but also as symbolic figures through which social meanings and ideological positions are articulated. As McCloud (2001) notes, comic characters often act as narrative avatars that guide readers' interpretation of the story. Their identity is constructed through the interaction of visual elements, such as gestures, posture, facial expressions, and symbolic objects, with verbal dialogue and narrative framing. From a multimodal discourse perspective, these elements operate as semiotic resources that shape how audiences interpret the authority, role, and significance of characters within the narrative structure (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Despite the growing recognition of comics as important cultural texts, relatively limited research has examined how individual characters in historical comics function as discursive sites where ideological meanings are constructed through multimodal representation. Existing studies have primarily focused on narrative themes, genre conventions, or the broader political messaging embedded in visual storytelling (De Fina, 2023; Roth, 2021; Song et al., 2022). As a result, the role of character-centered multimodal representation in negotiating historical narratives remains underexplored, particularly in the context of Indonesian historical comics.

Based on the identified gaps and problems, the objectives of this research are as follows. First, this study aims to analyze how the character Herman Johannes is multimodally constructed through the interaction of visual and verbal elements in the comic *Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle*. Second, this research seeks to examine how this representation contributes to the reinterpretation of historical agency within narratives of the Indonesian independence struggle, particularly by positioning a civilian intellectual as a strategic contributor within a narrative traditionally dominated by military actors. Third, this study aims to identify the ideological implications of such representation, including how the comic negotiates the civil-military divide and expands the conceptualization of struggle beyond armed resistance.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding the application of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) within comics studies by demonstrating how character-centered multimodal analysis can reveal the negotiation of ideological meanings in historical narratives. Furthermore, the findings enrich scholarly discussions on visual culture, cultural memory, and historical

representation by highlighting the role of comics as discursive spaces where alternative interpretations of national history are articulated. This study also provides a methodological framework that can be adapted by researchers examining historical representation in other visual media, including graphic novels, illustrated books, and digital comics.

Practically, this research provides insights for comic creators, cultural producers, and educators regarding how visual narratives can be employed to present more inclusive representations of historical agency that acknowledge diverse forms of contribution beyond conventional military heroism. For comic industry practitioners, the findings offer guidance on how character design, visual symbolism, and dialogue can be strategically employed to construct historical figures as multimodal articulations of ideological meaning. For educators and cultural heritage practitioners, this study demonstrates the potential of comics as pedagogical tools for teaching history in ways that accommodate multiple perspectives on national events. Finally, for policymakers and cultural institutions, the research highlights the importance of supporting diverse historical narratives in popular media as part of broader efforts to foster inclusive cultural memory.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach. MCDA was chosen because the object of analysis, the comic medium, communicates meaning through the interaction of multiple semiotic modes, particularly visual imagery and written language. In comics, narrative meaning is constructed not only through dialogue or textual narration but also through visual elements such as character gestures, spatial composition, framing, and symbolic objects within panels. Therefore, an analytical approach that integrates both visual and verbal dimensions is necessary in order to understand how meaning is articulated within the narrative.

MCDA extends the principles of critical discourse analysis by incorporating the examination of various semiotic resources within a single analytical framework (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2020). Through this approach, discourse is understood not merely as linguistic expression but as a multimodal phenomenon in which meaning emerges from the interaction between different representational forms. In the context of comics, this perspective allows the researcher to analyze how visual representation and verbal dialogue jointly construct ideological meanings within the narrative structure.

The study adopts an interpretive analytical perspective in which the comic is treated as a cultural text embedded within broader socio-historical contexts. Rather than seeking to measure variables quantitatively, the analysis focuses on interpreting how multimodal elements contribute to the articulation of particular ideological positions through character representation.

Data Source

The primary object of this study is the character Herman Johannes as represented in the comic *Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle*, published in 2015 by Gatra Pustaka. The comic is part of a six-volume series titled *Komando Rajawali*, which narrates episodes related to the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949). The fifth volume focuses on the historical event known as the General Offensive of 1 March 1949 in Yogyakarta, a coordinated Indonesian

military operation during the Indonesian War of Independence that sought to demonstrate the continued existence of the Republic of Indonesia to the international community.

Within the narrative of this volume, Herman Johannes appears as a historical figure who differs from most other characters in the series. While the majority of characters are depicted as military figures involved in armed resistance, Herman Johannes is portrayed as a civilian scientist contributing technical expertise to the struggle. This distinctive narrative position makes the character particularly relevant for examining how alternative roles within the independence movement are represented in visual storytelling.

Additional contextual information about the comic's production was obtained through interviews with the comic's writer and illustrator, Edna Caroline and Thomdean (2024), which provided insight into the creative intentions behind the representation of historical figures in the narrative.

Data Selection

The unit of analysis in this study consists of comic panels that depict the character, Herman Johannes. A total of 35 panels containing the character were identified throughout the comic. From this set, panels that contain significant multimodal articulation, particularly those in which visual representation and verbal dialogue interact to construct meaning, were selected for detailed analysis.

The selection of panels was guided by two criteria. First, panels that explicitly present the introduction, characterization, or narrative role of Herman Johannes were prioritized. Second, panels that display prominent visual and verbal interactions, such as dialogue exchanges, gestures, or symbolic visual elements, were selected because they offer greater potential for multimodal interpretation. Based on these criteria, several representative panels were chosen to illustrate key patterns of character articulation within the narrative.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, verbal elements within the selected panels were examined to identify lexical choices, dialogue structure, and narrative framing related to the character. Particular attention was given to how language constructs social relationships, authority, and identity within the narrative context.

Second, visual elements were analyzed using the concept of visual grammar proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). This analysis focused on aspects such as character posture, gaze direction, spatial composition, framing, and visual salience within the panel. These visual features were examined to determine how they contribute to the representation of character identity and narrative authority.

Finally, the verbal and visual analyses were integrated to interpret how multimodal elements collectively articulate ideological meanings within the comic. Through this integrated approach, the study seeks to identify how the character Herman Johannes functions as a discursive element within the narrative, particularly in relation to broader ideological themes concerning militarism, civilian contribution, and historical representation in Indonesian War of Independence comics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introducing Authority: The Discursive Endorsement of Herman Johannes

The first significant articulation of the character Herman Johannes appears in a panel depicting an interaction between several military figures and the fictional members of Komando Rajawali. In this scene, Lieutenant Colonel Soeharto instructs the main characters to meet Herman Johannes in order to learn from him. Although the character himself is not yet visually present, his importance within the narrative is established through verbal endorsement by a historically authoritative figure.



Figure 1. Initial reference to Herman Johannes in the comic Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle

Source: Edna Caroline & Thomdean (2015)

From a multimodal perspective, this panel constructs authority through both verbal and visual resources. The dialogue attributed to Soeharto functions as a discursive framing device that positions Herman Johannes as a figure of expertise and knowledge. By recommending that the protagonists “learn” from him, the narrative assigns epistemic authority to a character who is not yet physically introduced in the visual frame.

Visually, the panel reinforces hierarchical relations between the characters. Gatot Subroto and Soeharto occupy the visual focal point in the midground, while the fictional protagonists are placed in the foreground with their backs facing the reader. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen’s concept of visual salience, central positioning and direct visibility contribute to the perceived authority of represented participants. The composition therefore visually reinforces the discursive hierarchy established through dialogue: military leaders occupy the central authoritative position, while the protagonists appear as subordinate learners. Within this hierarchical framework, the reference to Herman Johannes acquires symbolic significance because his authority is validated by figures already recognized within the dominant narrative of Indonesian military history.

Thus, even before the character appears visually, the narrative establishes Herman Johannes as an epistemic authority within the story world. This narrative strategy prepares the reader to reinterpret the role of expertise within the struggle narrative, suggesting that knowledge may function as an alternative form of power alongside military command.

Constructing Mystery: The Visual Introduction of an Unfamiliar Historical Figure

The first visual appearance of Herman Johannes is deliberately staged through partial concealment of his face, creating a sense of mystery surrounding the character. In the scene, the protagonists wait in a room filled with books while a figure appears in silhouette, with his face obscured by backlighting.



Figure 2. The first visual appearance of Herman Johannes, presented through shadow and partial concealment

Source: Edna Caroline & Thomdean (2015)

The visual composition employs what Gestalt psychology describes as the principle of closure, where incomplete visual information encourages the viewer to mentally reconstruct the missing elements (Wagemans et al., 2012). By obscuring the character's face, the comic invites readers to actively interpret the identity of the figure while simultaneously emphasizing his unfamiliarity within the narrative.

This visual strategy also reflects the character's marginal status within dominant historical narratives. Unlike widely recognized figures such as Soeharto or Gatot Subroto, Herman Johannes is presented as someone whose identity must first be discovered. The multimodal construction of mystery therefore functions not merely as a narrative device but also as a symbolic representation of historical invisibility. Through the visual withholding of identity, the comic implicitly acknowledges that certain historical actors remain less visible within dominant accounts of the the Indonesian War of Independence struggling.

Cultural Identity and Linguistic Markers

Another key articulation of the character emerges through linguistic cues that signal Herman Johannes's cultural background. In one panel, the character introduces himself using the word *beta*, a pronoun commonly used in Eastern Indonesian regions such as Maluku and East Nusa Tenggara.



Figure 3. Close-up visual representation of Herman Johannes accompanied by dialogue introducing his linguistic identity

Source: Edna Caroline & Thomdean (2015)

From a discourse perspective, lexical choice plays a crucial role in constructing social identity. The use of beta functions as a cultural marker that situates the character within a particular regional and ethnic background. In the context of Indonesian historical narratives, such markers are significant because they highlight the presence of actors from regions outside the traditionally dominant Javanese political and cultural centers.

Visually, the panel reinforces this identity construction through a close-up framing that isolates the character's gaze. According to visual grammar theory, close-up shots emphasize psychological engagement and interpersonal connection between the character and the viewer. The combination of linguistic markers and direct visual focus therefore foregrounds Herman Johannes as a figure who introduces a different cultural presence into the narrative space.

Knowledge as a Weapon: The Symbolic Role of the Book

The comic also articulates Herman Johannes's identity as a scientist through symbolic visual elements. In one scene, he hands books to the protagonists while instructing them to complete an assignment before reporting back to him.



Figure 4. Herman Johannes presenting books as a form of intellectual instruction

Source: Edna Caroline & Thomdean (2015)

Within the visual composition, the book functions as a symbolic object representing knowledge. By presenting the book as a form of instruction within a military environment, the narrative introduces an alternative conceptualization of struggle, one that emphasizes intellectual contribution alongside physical combat.

The gesture of throwing the books toward the protagonists further reinforces the character's assertive personality. In visual grammar terms, gestures and body posture serve as indicators of interpersonal relations and authority. The upward movement of the hand holding the book visually emphasizes the importance of knowledge within the scene. Through this multimodal articulation, the comic redefines the concept of "weapon" in the context of struggle: knowledge becomes a strategic resource comparable to military equipment.

Negotiating the Civil–Military Divide

A particularly significant scene occurs when one of the protagonists questions the relevance of books in a battlefield context, stating that fighters should rely on weapons rather than intellectual knowledge. This moment introduces an explicit ideological tension between military and civilian forms of contribution.



Figure 5. Dialogic confrontation between Panji and Herman Johannes representing the civil–military tension

Source: Edna Caroline & Thomdean (2015)

The panel visually stages this confrontation through spatial positioning. Panji appears holding a firearm, while Herman Johannes holds a book. These objects operate as symbolic representations of two different forms of struggle: armed resistance and intellectual strategy. The symmetrical placement of the characters across the panel visually highlights the opposition between these two perspectives.

Rather than presenting the conflict as a simple rejection of military struggle, the narrative uses this dialogue to explore the possibility of integrating both forms of contribution. Herman Johannes's presence within the military environment suggests that intellectual expertise can function as a complementary force rather than an alternative to armed resistance. In this sense, the comic articulates a more complex understanding of historical agency in which scientific knowledge and technological innovation become integral components of the independence struggle.

Reframing Historical Agency in Narratives of the Indonesian War of Independence

The findings of this study demonstrate that the representation of Herman Johannes in *Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle* functions as a multimodal articulation that reframes dominant representations of historical agency in narratives of the Indonesian War of Independence. Historical storytelling about this period, particularly during the New Order regime, tended to foreground military leadership as the primary driving force behind national

liberation. Within this narrative framework, armed resistance and military command were often presented as the central mechanisms through which independence was achieved, while the contributions of civilian intellectuals, scientists, and technical experts received comparatively limited attention (Putra, 2017).

The multimodal construction of Herman Johannes in the comic introduces an alternative perspective on historical agency. Through the interaction of visual symbolism, spatial composition, and verbal dialogue, the character is positioned not as a conventional military hero but as a scientific figure whose expertise contributes to the strategic dimensions of the struggle. Rather than depicting the independence movement solely through scenes of armed confrontation, the narrative expands the conceptualization of participation by emphasizing knowledge production and technological innovation as forms of national service.

From a discourse analytical perspective, this narrative shift can be interpreted as a process of ideological negotiation within historical storytelling. Discourse scholars have argued that cultural texts often reproduce dominant ideological frameworks while simultaneously providing spaces where those frameworks may be reinterpreted or subtly contested. In this case, the comic does not reject the dominant narrative of military heroism; instead, it recontextualizes it by introducing complementary forms of contribution. Through this narrative strategy, the text implicitly questions the assumption that historical significance during the Indonesian War of Independence is defined exclusively through military action.

Such reinterpretation reflects broader developments in contemporary historical discourse, particularly in the Reformasi era, where alternative perspectives on national history have increasingly emerged within academic and cultural discussions (Dibley & Ford, 2019). By foregrounding the role of a civilian scientist within a historically militarized narrative context, the comic participates in a wider effort to broaden the understanding of historical agency in representations of Indonesia's independence struggle.

Multimodal Construction of Intellectual Authority

The analysis also demonstrates how multimodal elements within the comic contribute to the construction of intellectual authority as a legitimate form of historical agency. Unlike conventional portrayals of military heroes, the authority of Herman Johannes is articulated through visual symbols associated with knowledge, such as books, laboratory tools, and gestures associated with teaching or explanation.

Within the framework of multimodal discourse analysis, these visual features function as semiotic resources that communicate meaning beyond textual dialogue (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Ledin & Machin, 2020). The presence of books within the visual frame, for example, symbolically redefines the concept of "weapon" within the narrative. While other characters rely on firearms and military equipment, Herman Johannes introduces knowledge as an alternative form of strategic power.

The juxtaposition of books and weapons within several panels visually represents two distinct modes of contribution to the independence struggle. This contrast operates not merely at the narrative level but also at the level of visual composition, where symbolic objects guide readers' interpretation of the character's role. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) suggest, visual composition, spatial arrangement, and symbolic objects contribute to the representation of power relations and social identities within visual texts.

From this perspective, the comic's visual grammar constructs a form of authority that is rooted not in military hierarchy but in intellectual expertise. The representation of Herman Johannes as both a scientist and an educator reinforces the idea that intellectual labor and scientific knowledge constitute forms of resistance within the broader context of national struggle.

Negotiating the Civil–Military Divide in Historical Representation

Another significant aspect revealed by the analysis is the narrative negotiation between civilian and military forms of contribution within representations of the Indonesian War of Independence. This tension becomes particularly visible in scenes where military characters initially question the practical relevance of scientific knowledge in the context of armed conflict. Through these interactions, the comic stages a dialogic encounter between two different conceptions of struggle: one centered on military force and the other on intellectual strategy.

Rather than resolving this tension through the dominance of one perspective, the narrative ultimately integrates both forms of contribution. Herman Johannes is depicted operating within a military environment while simultaneously maintaining his identity as a scientist and educator. This hybrid positioning suggests that the struggle for independence involved not only armed resistance but also intellectual and technological innovation.

Such narrative negotiation illustrates how cultural texts participate in the reinterpretation of historical meaning. As scholars of visual culture have noted, media representations frequently reshape historical narratives by foregrounding alternative actors and perspectives that were previously marginalized. In this sense, the comic contributes to the ongoing reconstruction of Indonesian historical memory by expanding the range of actors associated with the independence struggle.

Comics and the Reconstruction of Historical Memory

Beyond the specific case of Herman Johannes, the findings highlight the broader role of comics as cultural media capable of reshaping historical memory. Unlike academic historiography, which typically relies on textual analysis and archival documentation, comics communicate historical narratives through multimodal storytelling that combines visual symbolism, narrative framing, and emotional engagement.

Scholars of comics studies argue that the sequential structure of comics enables complex historical events to be represented through the interaction of visual and verbal modes, allowing visual narratives to function as forms of historical witnessing and cultural memory (Chute, 2016). Through visual representation, character design, and symbolic imagery, comics can foreground actors who may remain peripheral in official historiography.

In this context, the representation of Herman Johannes illustrates how comics function as sites of discursive negotiation, where dominant historical narratives may be reinterpreted through alternative visual representations. By presenting a scientist as a central figure within a narrative traditionally dominated by military heroes, the comic expands the range of identities associated with the Indonesian War of Independence.

Theoretical and Scholarly Implications

The findings of this study contribute to several areas of scholarship related to multimodal discourse analysis, comics studies, and the representation of historical narratives. First, the study extends the application of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to the analysis of comics as ideological texts. While previous research has frequently examined narrative themes, stylistic conventions, or genre characteristics within comics, fewer studies have explored how the interaction of visual and verbal semiotic resources constructs ideological meanings through the representation of specific characters. By analyzing the multimodal construction of Herman Johannes, the present study demonstrates how character representation in comics can function as a site where ideological interpretations of history are articulated.

Second, the analysis highlights the analytical value of character-centered multimodal analysis in understanding how historical narratives are negotiated within visual media. Earlier studies of comics have often focused on broader narrative structures or political messaging embedded within stories (Witek, 1989). The findings of this research suggest that ideological meanings are frequently articulated through the multimodal construction of individual characters, whose visual representation, gestures, symbolic objects, and dialogue collectively shape readers' interpretation of historical agency. This perspective expands methodological approaches within comics scholarship by showing how character representation can function as a discursive mechanism through which alternative interpretations of historical events are negotiated.

Third, the study contributes to discussions on historical representation and cultural memory by highlighting the role of civilian intellectuals within narratives of the Indonesian War of Independence. Historical storytelling about this period has often foregrounded military leadership, particularly in narratives shaped during the New Order regime (Putra, 2017). By visually positioning a civilian scientist within a narrative traditionally dominated by military actors, the comic introduces an alternative perspective that broadens the range of identities associated with the independence struggle. In doing so, the comic participates in the reinterpretation of national history within the broader discursive environment of the Reformasi era, where alternative perspectives on historical agency have increasingly emerged (Dibley & Ford, 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that comics should be examined not only as narrative artifacts but also as multimodal discursive spaces in which historical meaning, ideological positions, and cultural memory are actively constructed and negotiated.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite offering insights into the multimodal articulation of historical representation in comics, several limitations should be acknowledged (Cook & Chisholm, 2025; Donnelly, 2018; Nedzinskaitė-Mitkė, 2026). First, the analysis focuses on a single comic volume, *Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle*. Although this text provides a relevant case for examining the representation of Herman Johannes, it represents only one narrative instance within the broader landscape of Indonesian historical comics. Future research could broaden the scope by examining multiple comic series or other visual media that depict figures associated with the Indonesian War of Independence, thereby allowing comparative analysis of how different narratives construct historical agency.

Second, the study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. While this method enables detailed examination of visual and verbal elements, interpretive analysis inevitably reflects the analytical perspective of the researcher. Although the analysis draws upon established theoretical frameworks in multimodal discourse studies (Machin & Mayr, 2012), alternative interpretations of visual symbolism may also be possible. Future studies could therefore complement multimodal analysis with audience reception research in order to explore how readers interpret the representation of historical figures in comics.

Finally, the present study focuses primarily on character representation within the narrative rather than examining the broader production context of the comic industry. Additional research could investigate how editorial practices, publishing strategies, and historical discourse influence the depiction of historical actors in Indonesian visual media. Such approaches may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural production processes shape the construction of historical narratives. Addressing these directions may further deepen scholarly understanding of how multimodal narratives participate in the ongoing negotiation of historical representation and cultural memory.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the representation of Herman Johannes in the comic *Komando Rajawali 05: The Final Battle* using a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis approach. The findings indicate that the character functions as a multimodal articulation that reinterprets the concept of historical agency within narratives of the Indonesian War of Independence. Through the interaction of visual symbolism, spatial composition, and verbal dialogue, the comic constructs Herman Johannes not as a conventional military hero but as a civilian scientist whose intellectual expertise contributes to the strategic dimensions of the struggle. Visual elements such as books, gestures, and character positioning operate as semiotic resources that symbolically redefine the notion of “weapon” within the narrative, framing knowledge and scientific expertise as complementary forms of power alongside armed resistance. More broadly, the study demonstrates how comics can serve as cultural media that participate in the reinterpretation of historical narratives. By foregrounding the role of a civilian intellectual within a narrative environment traditionally dominated by military actors, the comic expands the representation of participation in the independence struggle. These findings underscore the potential of comics as multimodal cultural texts that contribute to the construction and negotiation of historical meaning within contemporary visual media.

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