

Visualizing Heroes: Heroicism as a Visual Narrative in Indonesia's Presidential Election

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Abstract, The narrations of heroes are believed originated from the first dawn of human's civilization. From choosing group leaders; the 'aggression' against Mother Nature; and conquering other tribes was done in order to maintain group sustainability. From a long history of mankind constructed various form of hero figure that still reproduced until this very day. The manifestations of hero figure were embodied in cultural artifacts from the past, superhero in popular culture, to the real figures that is very close in our daily life. We use the hero analogy as a way to understand the contestation of the 2019 Presidential Election in Indonesia. Especially on how Prabowo Subianto were idealized as a hero figure—that will bring the glorious future of Indonesia. Through Instagram, we analyzed how Prabowo Subianto creating his own heroic visual narratives that are very familiar with the visual construction of the Indonesia people which presented through the popular heroic personage.

Keywords: Heroes, Digital Ethnography, Politics, Instagram

1. Introduction

In the early 2000s, Time magazine published a photo of Iwan Fals as the cover of the magazine. The title was, "Asians Heroes". Now let's think about how this even possible: Iwan Fals, an artist appeared in a close-up face, side by side with his guitar became one of the heroes in Asia with many other names, such as Xanana Gusmao, Hidetoshi Nakata, Jackie Chan, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Pramodya Ananta Toer. The image displayed in the cover of Time magazine is far from the impression of a hero. It is difficult for us to find the relationship between the Time magazine cover and the aspects of heroism in general.

The cover of Time magazine was a contrary to the generic image of heroes' in the Indonesia history books. Heroes, in the generic image coming from the age of war and usually use some specific clothing, such as: headgear, military uniform, Medal of Honor, traditional clothing, and distinctive attributes that contrast to public clothing in general.

As Loeb and Morris stated, the concept of a hero is a moral category (Loeb and Morris, 2005: 12). Moral itself, according to Benedict (1934) defined as a way of thinking, feeling, and acting, which

becomes a habit in every form of culture and is often accepted as a natural construction. The problem is, culture is particular, which means that even the moral aspects can vary in each cultural context. Morality, in the end is not universal.

In the Indonesia 2019 presidential election, heroes' narratives have been raised into public stage. These heroes' narratives are presented through verbal and visual. The publics reads and react to these verbal and visual heroes' narratives, like the heroes narratives that present on social media, where the two presidential candidates were presented like a hero who will bring the glorious future of Indonesia.

Social media eventually became one of the media chosen to socialize political narratives for the two Indonesia presidential candidates. Like the other political events, Instagram is also used as a media campaign, such as: The Governor of West Java, Ridwan Kamil who effectively use Instagram as a media to portray himself as an ideal leaders and Alexander Van der Bellen who elected as the President of Austria in 2016 by using Instagram as a campaign media (Leibhart & Bernhardt, 2017).

Instagram is different from other social media. This platform relies on the visual aspect, while allowing users to write something in the

caption. This visual aspect is often used to display certain images, and this is such a good thing to boost the electability of candidates during election. The image is displayed through language that is seen through figures—as part of dramaturgy that is also displayed to the public. Attributes such as clothing, become one of the conveying media that is exposed in the visual. Turner stated that, “Dress and bodily adornment constitute one such cultural medium, perhaps the most special in shaping and communication of personal and social identity” (2012: 486).

So how is the heroic visualization that is displayed in a visual image? In this research we want to show how the clothing and all the other attributes of the presidential candidates in social media are not independently valueless. What is present through social media is part of a discourse that is trying to be communicated to the public for the sake of the presidential election. Also we want to examine the presence of the same pattern with the other heroes’ visuals narratives, both in mythology and today popular culture.

2. Methods

Researching on Internet is relatively a new phenomenon, especially the mechanism of visual narrative that normalizes images in a political context. We used virtual ethnographic approach, which is a new approach to seeing cultural, artifact in the virtual world (Nasrullah, 2018). Virtual ethnography reveals how cyber culture is produced, meanings, relationships and patterns, to how they function through the medium of the Internet (Nasrullah, 2018). There are several levels of analysis such as ‘media space’, ‘media document’, ‘media objects’, and ‘experiential stories’.

This research is ‘media document’ level because examined variety of Prabowo’s Instagram uploads. We used the Instagram to search the visual data in this research. Instagram account of Prabowo Subianto (@prabowo) is the main data source in research. We also have the other supporting data such as books and digital visual methods. Other data such as the connection of the account with the phenomenon of presidential election on Instagram is done by active participation, where we place ourselves as users of the Instagram platform and part of today’s digital society.

3. Discussion

Presidential Election (Pilpres) in Indonesia is a national event once in a five years. After the end of the New Order under Suharto’s regime, Indonesia has gone through five presidential elections. Four of them (2004, 2009, 2014, 2019) have adopted a direct election system, after previously being elected by the MPR (Parliaments). The direct election system allows people to determine the next President according to their preferences. But, on the other hand, the candidates must introduce them self to a wider audience.

Outdoor media campaigns such as poster, banner, stickers, and other are still being displayed massively in various corners of the city. The outdoor media campaigns displaying candidates with the same old formula—exposing the candidate figure. Social media, Instagram were not very different when it comes to these election years. The presidential candidate, Joko Widodo (@Jokowi) and Prabowo (@prabowosubianto) also ‘compete’ on Instagram with their own images of an ideal Indonesian leader.

Lieutenant General (ret.) Prabowo Subianto, in 2019, participated again in the Indonesia presidential elections. He compete against the incumbent candidate, Ir. Joko Widodo after expiring his first five-year term. Jokowi and Prabowo became the only main figures in the 2019 presidential election. It can be seen from the community’s that support for both such as in political parades as well as in social media.

3.1. The Constructions of Heroes

In the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), the word “Heroes” mean, “the person who stands out because of his courage and sacrifice defending the truth; brave fighters”. The definition leads to many other questions, what are courage, sacrifice, truth, and bravery? Heroes as a conception as mention in the Indonesia law, were: National Heroes is a title given to Indonesian citizens or someone who fights colonialism in an area that is now the territory of the Republic of Indonesia that has died or died in defense of the nation and state, or who during his lifetime carried out heroic acts or produced achievements and works that extraordinary for the development and progress of the nation and state of the Republic of Indonesia (Article 1 paragraph 4).

For that Law we see there are several categorization of heroism mentioned: (1) Fall or die;

(2) fighting against colonialism; and (3) achievements and works for development. All three are in the framework of ‘for the sake of nation and state’. The framework is contradictory to the definition of nation and state. Some of these National Heroes actually carried out their actions (the resistance against the colonial state) before the founding of the Republic of Indonesia.

From the contradiction about the origin of the word “Heroes”, we tried another entrance, taking references through words in other languages, which were equivalent to “Hero”. Heroes etymologically derived from ancient Greek, *hērōs*. *Hērōs* refers as protector. Heroic figures are often portrayed through epics in his day. Heracles (Hercules), Prometheus, and Achilles, who are described as manifestations of God, a mixture of mortal and god—a demigod. All of them have the same pattern, described as a protector. Another aspect that cannot be nullified is that all of them are narrated as having the character of an aggressor.

Through the ancient Greek artifacts, we can see the visuals that represent the figures as heroes. Some of them are recorded through ancient Greek artifacts in the form of *pelike*: a ceramic container with two open handles.



Gambar 1 Herakles & Cerberus (amphora, 520-510 BCE)

One of the figures that appeared in *pelike*'s paintings is Heracles (Hercules). He became an iconic figure in the ancient world of heroism. Until this very present day, the story Heracles' are still adapted in various versions. From the paintings in the amphora, we can how Herakles wore a costume with a head cover. His costume was earned from his first assignment, as part of the twelve commandments (Stafford 2012: 25). In battle, he uses various weapons. In the picture, he uses a mace, chain, and

knife at his waist. These attributes are typical for heroic figures. It is different from what is shown in Figure 2. Human figures (man) are seen were not wearing any clothes, he brings a cot or sofa in preparation for a party for the wealthy host (Murcia, 2017).



Gambar 2 Visualization of slavery in *pelike*

Cultural artifacts that represent life in the ancient times in the form of *pelike* at least provide clues about images that are present through visuals. How the attributes that are worn become a marker of social status. So how was the visual-visual relationship of the hero of that period reproduced at this time? Through superhero characters, the repetition of patterns still occurs. Some examples of visualizations will be shown from the two characters below.



Gambar 3 Alter ego and superhero)

The depictions of superheroes, such as Superman (Clark Joseph Kent), Spiderman (Peter Benjamin Parker), and Batman (Bruce Wayne) they were portrayed as figures who have alternative personalities. As an ordinary human are usually shown by the use of everyday clothes, even with physical deficiencies, according to the role they face with other humans. For example, the role of news

reporter like Clark Kent and Peter Parker is described by wearing a shirt, and eyes glasses. Adapting the depiction of the working class in New York. This section shows how to bring character to the 'ordinary human' reality, both in the aspects of costume and livelihood. In contrast when they become superheroes, they use costumes where we find it difficult to associate them with everyday clothes. The obvious visual element is a suit, using a mask, or with wings hanging on the back. Some of them are equipped with weapons and super abilities—a privilege that ordinary humans do not have.

From the explanation we can figured an early assumption: the image of the attributes imposed on the bodies of heroic figures has symbolic similarities in visual patterns. Proving, that what is attached to the body and then displayed, as part of social relations with other humans, is not exclusively value-free.

3.2. The Heroes Narration on Indonesia Presidential Campaign

On two different occasions, Prabowo Subianto criticized the government with the 2030 Indonesian doomsdays. As noted by Aiman Witjaksono, one of the journalists at the Kompas national newspaper, Prabowo stated that:

“Tetapi di negara lain, mereka sudah bikin kajian-kajian di mana Republik Indonesia sudah dinyatakan tidak ada lagi tahun 2030. Bung, mereka ramalkan kita ini bubar!”

“In other countries, they made studies in which in 2030 the Republic of Indonesia has no longer exist. Brother and sister, they predict we are extinct!”

In the next speech, he still talking about the extinction of a country, Indonesia:

“Sudah terlalu lama elite yang berkuasa puluhan tahun, sudah terlalu lama mereka memberi arah keliru. Sistem yang salah. Dan saya katakan, bahwa sistem ini kalau diteruskan akan mengakibatkan Indonesia lemah. Indonesia semakin miskin, dan

semakin tidak berdaya bahkan bisa punah.”

“It's been too long for elites who have been in power for decades, they have given too long a wrong direction. Wrong system. And I say, if this system continues it will cause Indonesia to be weak. Indonesia is getting poorer, and even more powerless can even become extinct.”

Jokowi respond to Prabowo's, he stated to Prabowo statement as pessimistic speech that came from such a (candidate) leaders. M. Amin, the vice presidential candidates from Jokowi also commented in a strong sarcastically words, “Are Indonesia a kind of pre-historic animal?”

The several occasion between the two presidential candidates, describe the presidential election in Indonesia as a kind of arena for the narrative battle between the two candidates. Each tries to build an image through political statements in public. Prabowo tried to appear as a problem solver figure to prevent the extinction of Indonesia. On the other hand, Jokowi, takes the role of a figure who fights the narratives of destruction (optimistic figure) Although the phenomenon looks contrasting, the events that occur are like a series of actions and reactions from the statements made in public. In this context, both of them appear as aggressors because of the thing that occurs the presidential election can be interpreted as an arena for verbal narrative battles.

3.3. The Hero Visualisation on Prabowo Subianto Presidential Campaign

As a nation, Indonesia was born through a series of processes. The foreigner arrival to Indonesia can be categorized in several narratives, one them is colonialism. This condition is often associated with the terminology of the war of independency. These categorize then legitimized the general version of Indonesia history—Indonesian independence was achieved through a seemingly never-ending war, not gifts from any country.

In this scenario: the war for the independence of Indonesia, hero figures have exposed up through history books that taught since the elementary education. From this book, a visual

reference of heroism in Indonesia began to be presented. Some of them come from the military, where special attributes are displayed in the photos.

The visual relations between presidential election candidates and the military can easily be found in the Instagram account of one of the candidate, Prabowo Subianto. His background as a military was reintroduced through photos displayed in his Instagram account @prabowo. This is one of the many exsample:



Gambar 4 Military uniform as a sign of military institution

The photo in Figure 4 was published on August 23, 2018. Almost a year before the presidential election held. In the photo, we can see that the military attributes exposed through the green Service Office Uniform (PDU), one of the uniforms in military with 3 stars on the shoulder—a rank of a Lieutenant General officer. In terms of rank, Prabowo became one of the important figures of his time. He was the commander of the Indonesia military Special Forces, it also added to his track record of his leadership in military. Berets, or headgear, are also a symbol of a corps. In his beret we also see the 3 stars as those embedded in his uniform.

In the next picture (Figure 5), rows of Medal of Honor were strongly exposed. The Medal of Honor were embedded in the same uniform. Still with a sign of rank, the award reiterated his contribution to the Indonesia military. There were the Kartika Eka Pakçi Pratama and Nararya medal, which were specifically pinned to high-ranking officers in the army corps. In some uniform parts, there were a brevet Kopassus skydiver, freefall, and pathfinder. Brevets were usually associated with a sign of proficiency in the military world, after going through courses or education.



Gambar 5 Medal of Honor as a sign of individual contribution for the country

The next picture (Figure 6) shows Prabowo using a type of TNI Field Service Uniform (PDL) with camouflage motifs. He also wearing a beret, complete with other military attributes, such as backpacks, mattresses, plus long barrel guns, and military knives on the left side of the body. The last two elements become privileges for those who are in the military service, because not everyone is given the right to bring and display these attributes in public.



Gambar 6 Salute gesture, camouflage uniform, backpack, military knife, and rifle

From the visual description of Prabowo Subianto that we've discussed, we can see a very similar pattern in how a heroes being portrayed. These patterns can be seen in the use of uniforms (clothes and headgear), weapons, and Medal of Honor. Audience will easier to find similarities in heroism from Prabowo Subianto with the mythological heroism and popular culture, rather than Joko Widodo through visual exposure on Instagram.

The 'war' with the enemies is not clearly visualized, not as those that we found in ancient artifacts: reliefs, paintings, or scenes from super hero movie. In the war narratives, the image of the hero is often obtained through verbal and written narratives.

4. Conclusion

In the end, the concept of a hero is not only identical with the moral concepts. In the context of this research, the moral aspect is more a continuation of what is seen through visual imagery. But the problems don't stop here. Visual image as a language (the form of a symbol) can be interpreted in an arbitrary manner, so that it can be interpreted differently.

From this research, it also shows that the definition of a hero is not stable. The definition involves aspects of space and time, which form a cultural construction that is partial and also dynamic. From this research, there are several aspects that have not been answered. From the same visual pattern, the war is no longer clearly illustrated. Why did this condition occur? How to explain these heroes' conceptions in a different Indonesia cultural constructs in? Are there any connecting dots in the Indonesia conception of heroes?

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