

Family Photography as Object and Practice in Independent Comics in Indonesia

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Abstract

One small element that is rarely put in the comics' scene setting is photographic imagery, commonly a portrait of a person or a family photograph. It is assumed that once a family photograph is presented in a comic, it definitely has a particular function. This study will examine how the family photograph as an object and practice is depicted and present the signification of the story meaning in independent comics. The research object is a drawing that represents a family photograph in a panel, or series of panels – consecutive or non-consecutive -in the independent comic "Pupus Putus Sekolah" (2022) and "Phagia" (2016) as the case study. This research uses a comic studies approach based on qualitative methods.

The first analysis process is to pay attention to the presence of family photographic images in comic stories. In the following analysis stage, family photographs are treated as an object defined by social practices based on a semiological/discursive approach, especially the Doing Family Photography approach introduced by Gillian Rose.

The study revealed that photographic images in independent comics were shown using the same artistic drawing style as the characters and objects in the story. The inclusion of family photographs in comics aims to present a portrayal of the 'evidence,' 'truth,' and 'indexicality' as the genuine authenticity of the photographed moments in photography while also serving as a symbolic picture in storytelling. The readers' comprehension of the indexical nature of the family photograph is inherently linked to the manner in which the photographic imagery is portrayed and organized with other elements in the sequential composition of comics.

Keywords: *family photography, object, practice, independent comic, graphic novel*

Foto Keluarga sebagai Objek dan Praktik dalam Komik Independen di Indonesia

Abstrak

Salah satu elemen kecil yang jarang dimasukkan ke dalam adegan komik adalah citra fotografi, biasanya potret seseorang atau foto keluarga. Diasumsikan jika foto keluarga disajikan dalam komik, pasti memiliki fungsi tertentu. Penelitian ini akan mengkaji bagaimana foto keluarga sebagai objek dan praktik digambarkan dan menyajikan signifikasi makna cerita dalam komik independen. Objek penelitian adalah gambar yang merepresentasikan foto keluarga dalam sebuah panel, atau rangkaian panel—berurutan atau tidak berurutan—dalam komik independen "Pupus Putus Sekolah" (2022) dan "Phagia" (2016) sebagai studi kasus. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi komik berdasarkan metode kualitatif.

Tahap analisis pertama adalah memperhatikan citra fotografi keluarga dalam cerita komik. Pada tahap analisis berikutnya, foto keluarga diperlakukan sebagai objek yang

didefinisikan oleh praktik sosial, berdasarkan pendekatan semiologis/diskursif, terutama pendekatan Doing Family Photography yang diperkenalkan oleh Gillian Rose.

Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa gambar fotografi dalam komik independen ditampilkan menggunakan gaya gambar yang sama dengan karakter dan objek dalam cerita. Pencantuman foto keluarga dalam komik bertujuan untuk menyajikan penggambaran 'bukti', 'kebenaran', dan 'indeksikal' sebagai keaslian asli dari momen yang difoto dalam fotografi sekaligus berfungsi sebagai gambaran simbolis dalam bercerita. Pemahaman pembaca tentang sifat indeksikal foto keluarga secara inheren terkait dengan cara di mana citra fotografi digambarkan dan diatur dengan unsur-unsur lain dalam komposisi komik yang berurutan.

Kata kunci: foto keluarga, objek, praktik, komik independen, novel grafis

INTRODUCTION

When looking at independent comics published after 2010, it was found that photographic imagery was very rarely featured in stories. Some independent comics, such as “Tuna Kala” (2015), “Pupus Putus Sekolah” (2022), “Phagia” (2016), and “Demon Pepito” (2022), feature only one family photograph image in their visual narrative series. Family photography is the most conventional genre of photography, with a familiar set of images that emphasize positive themes of unity, mobility, prosperity, and futurity (Phu & Brown, 2015). Suppose there is only one type of family photograph presented in one or more panels in dozens of pages of independent comic stories. In that case, a curiosity is raised and will be answered with a comic study.

Independent comics refer to self-published comics that are made and distributed by the creator without any involvement from a larger publishing company. The emergence of this cultural phenomenon in Indonesia can be attributed to the creation of independent comics by students from art universities, which eventually became known as the 'Indie Comics Movement' between 1995 and the early 2000s. The evolution and characteristics of works in the history of British and American comics, apart from mainstream comics, can be categorized into three distinct periods: (1) Underground, (2) Independent, and (3) Alternative (Sabin, 1993, 1996). Until now, these categories in Indonesian comic culture have only been used to label self-published comic books as objects, referred to as '*komik underground*,' '*komik independen*,' '*komik indie*,' or '*komik alternatif*.' However, there has yet to be a distinction made based on their periodization and characterization.

During that period, independent comics primarily focused on enhancing freedom and self-expression in the creative process. They were anti-narrative and aimed to challenge the prevailing norms and conventions of the mainstream publisher. Several independent comics that debuted in 1994 were used to express social commentary and critique of the government (Berman, 2001). From this point

of view, independent comics from the late 1990s to the early 2000s had a format and content that were totally different compared to mainstream comic. Independent comics in Indonesia, which gained recognition starting in 1995, continued to thrive until the late 2010s (Bajraghosa, 2019) and kept growing as the titles published and presented in events such as Comifuro and Comipara in 2023 outnumbered mainstream comic publishing.

Due to their need to be accepted by the reader market, in most independent comics published after 2010, the format and content no longer have a noticeable difference compared to mainstream comics. Aside from the visual art style, storytelling has emerged as a vital component in developing independent comics in Indonesia, aiming to appeal to a broader yet targeted audience. Storytelling uses stories as an articulation tool for any individual to value, contribute to, and gain knowledge (Pichaichanarong, 2021). In delivering visual storytelling, a comic commonly puts characters, settings, and actions into the scenes, all in the form of images, texts, and imagetexts composed into single or sequential pages. One small element that is rarely put in the scene's setting is photographic imagery, an image in the form of an illustrative drawing that depicts a photographic medium. When a comic presents photographic imagery, it is commonly a portrait of a person or a family photograph. Because of its rarity, it is assumed that once a family photograph is presented in a comic, it definitely has a particular function in constructing the story's meaning, and it deserves a study.

Prior research on independent comics in Indonesia has chiefly emphasized their remarkable characteristics as a means of symbolic opposition to the New Order regime field field (Alkatiri, 2014). Several studies analyzed independent comics' rise, societal role, artistic aesthetics, and distribution methods from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. For example, one study focuses on Athonk's independent comic creations (Imanda, 2002).

Photography and Comics

The study has been conducted on the correlation between comics and the medium of photography. Photography serves as a means of documenting events, reinforcing the narrative, and gaining more potency when it is juxtaposed with comic imagery (Arsita, 2018). The inclusion of photography in comics significantly influences the visual storytelling techniques employed in the medium. It not only serves its intended purpose of documenting events but also goes beyond that by incorporating a combination of photography and cartooning. This can take various forms, such as a quasi-equal mix of photography and cartooning, cartoon-altered photographs reproduced, drawn photographs, and even photo comics (Fischer, 2012; Pedri, 2015). In addition, there are also instances of imagery in comics that

depict photography in the form of photographic imagery that exists within the narrative universe without directly referencing specific photographic works.

In Ganes TH's 'Taufan' (1973-1975), a single-family photograph became the central element of a 600-page comic narrative that covered the period from the Japanese colonial era to the New Order era. The photographic image of the family in the image tale surpasses its original role as a passive visual recorder, enabling it to record actively and present events (Ajidarma, 2022). The cultural importance of family photographs is studied by Gillian Rose, who stated that family photos are powerful as assemblages of both a certain kind of object and a certain kind of practice and for their subversive ethical potential. Family photographs are powerful, transformative objects, able to turn a dwelling place into a home and to make absent family members present as photographs (Bello, 2012). The study of family photography itself has become increasingly important and popular in the last thirty years. It is linked to subjectivity and identity, which can inspire the birth of contemporary works of art (Sutrisna & Sabana, 2015).

An examination of the family photographic imagery in independent comics published post-2010 will enhance the current field of research. The specific study cases are "Pupus Putus Sekolah" (2022) and "Phagia" (2016). The photographic imageries analyzed in this study are illustration depictions of family photographs in comics. Photographic techniques for scene visualization or photo collages are excluded. This study will examine how the family photograph as an object and practice is depicted and present the signification of the story meaning in independent comics.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The research object is a photographic imagery or drawing that represents a family photograph in a panel, or series of panels – consecutive or non-consecutive -in the independent comic "Pupus Putus Sekolah" (2022) and "Phagia" (2016) as the case study. Case studies were chosen because they are empirical in investigating contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts (Sarantakos, 2013).

The images in the "Pupus" and "Phagia" comics can be seen as iconic images that represent photo objects by considering three aspects of objectness photography, namely visual form, material form, and presentational form (Edwards, 2002), which are realized through drawings in comic media. This research uses a comic studies approach based on qualitative methods, which is used typically to explore new phenomena and pays primary attention to the process and interpretation of meaning, whether meaning is examined by the reading audience or meaning constructed by symbols in the text itself (Duncan & Smith, 2009; Given, 2008).

The analysis process is carried out in two stages. The first is to pay attention to the presence of family photographic images in comic stories and see them as elements in the story. The following analysis stage is the interpretation of what was found in the first stage of the analysis (Barker & Galasinski, 2001). In this analysis stage, family photographs are treated as an object defined by social practices. Contemporary visual culture is based on a semiological/discursive approach, which examines how social power relations are (re)articulated through visual images, especially the Doing Family Photography approach introduced by Gillian Rose (2010), which is applied partially. Rose emphasized the indexicality of family photography in her approach by considering and developing Roland Barthes' perspective on photography, especially *studium & punctum*, and using Stuart Hall's coding-decoding paradigm as a blend of semiology and Foucauldian discourse analysis.

The signs in an image are interpreted in relation to wider discursive structures, and those wider discursive structures are understood as producing unequal relations of class, gender, race, and sexuality, to list only their main dynamics (Rose, 2010). For Rose, family photography becomes essential not on the visual content but by participation in a shared cultural understanding of the photograph as an indexical image, bearing traces of the people in the photograph and what people do with the photograph as involved in the 'photographic transaction' (Bello, 2012).

Considering the object of 'family photos' to be examined in this paper is in the diegesis of comic stories, interview methods, and ethnographic observations conducted by Rose to see and define how subjects respond to family photos as practice, replaced by a comic textual study approach. Family photography as a practice will be seen through the combination of images in a particular panel and the arrangement of panel sequences, which combines Scott McCloud's (1993) theory of closure and Mario Saraceni's (2003) explanation of panel cohesion and coherence. Definitely, this is not an equivalent thing. However, it is considered commensurate with the purpose of the study, which is to find out how the image of family photos in comics is depicted and how the practice of family photos plays a role in building the story's meaning.

Comics use closures, a phenomenon of observing parts and viewing them as a whole, as an agent for showing change, time, and movement, with the help of a sequence of panels (McCloud, 1993), which is equivalent to coherence in Saraceni's view. Cohesion is used to indicate sequential relationships, either directly or separately, between one panel and another with a repetition pattern that displays the content of elements that convey 'added information' and 'given information' repeatedly and continuously so as to present the meaning of the story (Saraceni, 2003). A combination of words & images is used to emphasize the story.

The case study of family photography imagery in "Phagia" (Merdeka, 2016) and "Pupus Putus Sekolah" (Winata, 2022) will be examined to see the practice of family photography in the story, as composed by the creator of the comic to the affordance the reader's understanding, which through depiction shows its function in constructing the meaning of the story as a whole.

RESULTS

Family Photographic Imagery in "Pupus Putus Sekolah! Anak Berharga"

Kurnia Harta Winata independently created and released the comic book "Pupus Putus Sekolah!; Anak Berharga" in July 2022. The dimensions of this comic are A5 format, measuring 21x14cm. It has a thickness of 128 pages and is produced in color. The comic employs a realistic style and lighting for its settings and objects, but the characters are depicted in a cartoon style with black outlines and flat colors. The comic "Pupus" narrates the tale of a young girl named Pupus, who, upon the demise of her grandmother, dropped out of her school during her first year in primary school. Pupus is characterized as a discerning, forthright, and highly interested youngster. During her assistance to his uncle, who worked as a janitor at a university, Pupus met Professor Suryo, an elderly and respected lecturer. Professor Suryo assumed the role of a surrogate parent and issued an offer for Pupus to reside with him. He committed to assisting Pupus to continue to study anywhere, anytime, and from anyone, directly from life experience under his tutelage.

The graphic novel "Pupus Putus Sekolah" features photographic imagery in its 6th segment, specifically in the form of a family photograph of Professor Suryo when his daughters were still kids (figure 1). The family photo is affixed to the wall in the front room of the house, positioned above a little table and rattan chair, and oriented towards the front door. The gold-colored glass frames are used to showcase this family photo. Winata depicted the family photo imagery in a comic-like style, creating a realistic impression with smooth color transitions and no visible outlines. Professor Suryo and his wife are positioned in the background of the photograph, while their two young daughters are positioned in the foreground. The persons, positioned from left to right, consist of the First Daughter (adorned in a blue shirt), Professor Suryo (attired in a striped collared shirt), Professor Suryo's Wife (dressed in a white *encim* kebaya), and the Second Daughter (dressed in a pink shirt), all standing in a stance. The medium close-up angle captures the upper portion of the family's bodies, set against a backdrop of a dark brown gradation fabric commonly employed in photography studios. The Suryo family potograph is displayed as an object in the living room, specifically in a scene where Professor Suryo enjoying morning tea.



Figure 1. A page with a family photograph in “Pupus Putus Sekolah!”

Figure 2. Panel that contains Pupus apologize in front of the family photograph scene.

Source: Kurnia Harta Winata, 2022

Pupus asked about the Professor’s family while staring at the family photo. Professor described his family members as if it was the person the photo showed in several speech bubbles floating around and covering the photo itself;

“*Itu dua putraku. Yang besar jadi insinyur di Jerman. Yang kecil jadi dosen di Jakarta.*” (“Those are my two daughters. The older one became an engineer in Germany. The younger one is a lecturer in Jakarta.”)

On the next panel, a 'cropping' of the family photo, a zoom-in focused on the figure of the Professor's Wife, who has a calm and smiling gaze, is shown. A speech bubble floating addressed to the photo;

“*Yang itu istriku*” (“That's my wife”)

It was said that Professor Suryo's wife had passed away, and the cup he used to drink tea every morning was the cup his wife had bought for him. Professor Suryo remembers his beloved wife; by continuing to drink tea from the cup of memories, he felt like he was kissing his wife. He asked Pupus to be careful with the cup. The story escalates when Pupus carelessly breaks the cup. The image of the professor's wife was later presented twice in nonconsecutive panels, accompanying two scenes. The first was when Pupus accidentally broke the cup. The second after Pupus apologized, saying; “*Maaf Bu Profesor, tapi ini masa depan Pupus,*” (I am sorry

Madam Professor, but this is for Pupus's future"), in front of the family photo for breaking the cup and dishonestly hiding the broken cup.

Family Photographic Imagery in "Phagia" (2016)

Published independently for the first time in 2016, "Phagia" is 40 pages thick. In the first edition, a black and white digital copy was printed on book paper for the contents and yellow manila paper for the cover. This comic by Alzein P. Merdeka shows the story of a dysfunctional family with a slasher fantasy twist. The main character of this story is called Cil from the nickname Jago Cilik, a small child with an 'imaginary friend' toy figure called Jago Merah. Cil was neglected by and experienced violence from his two parents, who had an addiction. After his encounter with a girl who is the incarnation of a snake, Cil can transform into a Rooster Monster. The monster preyed on Cil's Father and Mother with the aim of ending their suffering as people with an addiction. This comic shows graphic sadistic scenes, which are put together through a choice of drawing style that seems spontaneous but detailed, with sketch-style strokes. Likewise, panel shapes, word balloons, and onomatopoeia are displayed in the same style.

The family photo image in "Phagia" is present on page 4 of this comic, in the bottom right panel (figure 3). Family photos are displayed in a photo frame mounted crookedly with cracked glass. In front of the photo, there is a glass with a bent spoon, which is identical to equipment for consuming narcotics. One word balloon contains Cil's words;

"Sejak ayah ibu sakit kita ga' pernah jalan-jalan lagi.. AKU PENGEN SEMBUHIN MEREKA" ("Since my father and mother were sick, we haven't gone out again... I WANT TO HEAL THEM").

Its position is in the right corner of the panel, covering part of the bottom right side of the photo. This remark is an inner dialogue between Cil and Jago Merah without referring to the family photo. However, the reader, through the family photo, is shown the introduction of the figures of Mother and Father for comparison. The figures of Mother, Father, and Cil in the photo look happy, wear neat clothes, and are very different compared to their appearance in the story scene. This panel containing family photos is on a page that explains the condition of Mother and Father, who Cil thinks are sick even though actually they were both drunk because they were addicted to narcotics.



Figure 3. A page with a family photograph in "Phagia"

Figure 4. Page. 40. The last page with a splash panel contained a family photograph.

Source: Alzein P. Merdeka, 2016

The same family photo is displayed in full on the last splash page at the end of the comic story "Phagia." There is a word balloon at the top right of this page, without pointing to the figure speaking but identical to the type of word balloon that accommodates the words of the Jago Merah. Contains text; "*Mereka berdua siapa sih?*" ("Who are those two?").

On page 40, this splash shows the condition of the family photo more clearly (figure 4). The family photo is tilted because it came loose from one of the hanger nails. The photo does not swing or fall because it is stuck on the table beneath it. The glass with the bent spoon also appears more clearly, accompanied by the exposed syringe. From the cracked glass of the photo frame, the smiling Mother embracing Cil and Father embracing mother can be seen. Cil is in the middle, smiling broadly, opening his arms, his right hand forming a victory finger sign behind Mother's head. Cil's left hand, which is holding up the Jago Merah action figure in a flying pose, is only visible in the photo on this page. The three of them have the same pose, shown more fully as a photo scene together with Father's digital pocket camera, assisted by a stranger girl who also visiting the beach, in the bottom panel, page 37. The pose, which shows the happy family togetherness, ends the story segment of Mother, Father, and Cil, who go for a walk to the beach.

DISCUSSION

The family photos in *Pupus* and *Phagia* can be discussed further by considering what makes them the object of the family photo itself, namely in terms of what is done to the object. The object "family photo" becomes 'existing' in the context of social practice and is formed by specific practices, which include production, circulation, display, and viewing (Rose, 2010)

Judging from the way it is depicted, the photographic image of the family in "*Pupus*" is similar to family photos produced in photo studios that are widely spread across the city of Yogyakarta, a city that is often used as a reference setting in this comic, in the 1980s - 1990s. This large photo is displayed in a gold frame in the living room, a domestic room commonly used to display family photos. Facing the entrance, installed in a room with a set of chairs and a guest table, this photo can be easily seen by the Professor and *Pupus* as residents of the house or if guests are visiting. In the comic story, this photo becomes the topic of discussion for *Pupus* and the Professor, who are having a conversation about their family.

The family photo in "*Phagia*" is displayed in a small frame that is more or less equivalent to 5R (12.7x17.8cm) in a thin frame. The process of making this photo is shown when Mother, Father, and Cil are walking to the beach, and it was recorded with the help of a girl using Father's digital pocket camera. This photo shows neglected in a corner of the messy living room, on a small table squeezed by a long sofa. This photo should be easy to see if the house is not in a state of disarray. Throughout the story of the "*Phagia*" comic, no characters are shown interacting or responding to this photo at all.

Observing family photos as objects embedded in practices means observing the quality of the material and how these qualities emerge in certain productive social practices to see the subject's position and relationship. The quality of a photo cannot be separated from Barthes' thoughts regarding 2 photo elements: *studium* and *punctum*. *Studium* is what is visible culturally on the surface of the photograph; technical and aesthetic aspects are ultimately always coded. What is seen in the family photos in the comics "*Pupus*" and "*Phagia*" has been described in the previous section. While the *punctum* is not always present, it emphasizes that an individual's experience and interpretation can influence the way a photo is viewed and felt, giving more impact to the viewer (Erlan, 2023). Barthes suggested that the *punctum* could emerge from two of a photograph's qualities: its indexicality and its evocation of the there-then shadowed by death (Rose, 2010). Meanwhile, in researching family photos, Rose did not find the *punctum* in accordance with what Barthes felt. Still, according to her, it is more about (1) Happy memories, (2) Absence, and (3) Indexicality.

The indexicality of a photo considers its referent, meaning that the photo is treated as a trace of the person it pictures, articulated through a spatiality of presence

and absence and a temporality of different pasts and futures. Indexicality in more depth is composed of 3 aspects. The first is evidence. The second is truth. The third is to describe or address the photo as if it were the person it showed (Rose, 2010).

Family Photograph in “Pupus Putus Sekolah”

In the tea-morning dialogue, when Professor Suryo answers Pupus’s question, he describes the family photo that the two of them are looking at, saying it is as if the photo was a member of his family.

“Itu dua putriku. Yang besar jadi insinyur di Jerman. Yang kecil jadi dosen di Jakarta” (Those are my two daughters. The older one became an engineer in Germany. The younger one is a lecturer in Jakarta”) and

“Yang itu istriku” (“That one is my wife”)

The mention shows that his children, who are not at home, and his wife, who has already passed away, are present in the room because of the indexical quality of the photo object. Meanwhile, the status of his wife, who has passed away, and the position of his children, who are outside the city and even abroad to work, show the absence. Regarding the subject position, at least two things can also be explored. First, it shows Professor Suryo’s identity as an elderly parent whose children left to migrate and work. Second, it shows the identity position of his two children as advanced women who have a high social class: an engineer in Germany and a lecturer in Jakarta.

When Pupus felt guilty about breaking the cup, she didn’t tell the Professor and instead hid it in the backyard so that she wouldn’t be kicked out of the house; Pupus then apologized to Professor Suryo’s wife. How does she apologize? The Professor’s wife has died. Pupus apologizes in front of the Professor’s family photo, with dialogue that this graphic novel readers can read. Which means it is as if Pupus is talking to the Professor’s Wife. This shows that the family photo is really treated as if it was what it was pictured: the Professor’s Wife.

In the scene where the cup falls, and after Pupus apologizes, a panel is shown containing the face of the professor’s wife, which is the same, cropped, and references the family photo that has been shown. It is still being determined what the panel will convey. However, from McCloud’s closure theory, it is said that any two or more images displayed in successive panels will form a relationship according to the reader’s ability to translate the relationship between the panels. From this, it can be said that the photo of the professor’s wife could have been present in Pupus’ mind as a mental reminder and, at the same time, created a visual reference in the reader’s mind because Winata on the next page uses the figure of the professor’s wife in a surprising moment, in Pupus’ nightmare.

For Pupus and the reader, the family photo becomes evidence of what the Professor’s Wife looks like, which then becomes the truth because there are no other

references that show the reality of the Professor's Wife other than the photo. The family photo is ultimately referred to by Pupus as if the person shows it, is mentioned directly or is spoken to as if the person in the photo can hear or respond. This was arranged well by Winata in his comic composition so that the story gets sufficient introductory background to carry out the plot of the following story into an emotional experience that is touching, funny, and interspersed with a bit of horror, in accordance with the story's intention to show that Pupus learned from the experience he had with the Professor.

The visual economy described by Rose (2010) can be seen differently in this discussion, namely as a form of design that uses as simple elements as possible to achieve the desired results. The "Pupus Putus Sekolah" comic successfully uses family photo elements as a simple, vital element to achieve the effect of telling the designed story.

Family Photograph in "Phagia"

In the story "Phagia," no characters are shown interacting with the family photo directly. In the social practice of family photos, who takes the photo is essential, so that a photo is considered more valuable, even though visually, it may show something that is not aesthetic (Rose, 2010). On page 37, the process of making the family photo in the story "Phagia" is described. It was recorded with a compact digital camera when the three of them walked to the beach, helped by a girl. The girl's help made it possible for Father, Mother, and Cil, as a nuclear family, to appear together happily in one photo frame.

The indexicality of photos as recording happy family moments is actually shown through the production, in the form of a scene of the photo recording process on the beach. The subject of the message conveying the memories in this series of stories needs to be clarified, whether it is Cil, Father, or Mother, and it could be none of the three. The scene of taking photos on the beach, which is clearly present in the story sequence of this comic, is inevitable for readers to understand so that they are able to know the story behind the creation of the photo. The subject's position showing the family's class layers is revealed through incidentally recorded family photos on the beach and not, for example, by preparation in glamorous studio photos.

Based on the composition of the pages and panels, the indexicality of the family photos in the Phagia comic refers to evidence of what Mother, Father, and Cil were like at some point before, and truth shows the reality that the family in the photo is the same as the one in this story. On the first page, the panel containing a photo of the family dressed and looking neat is juxtaposed with a panel containing Father lying on the sofa wearing a singlet and a sarong with long, dreadlocked hair

and sideburns, as well as a panel containing Mother lying on the floor dressed in casual clothes with messy hair.

The poses of Mother, Father, and Little, which are shown in full when photographed, appear as a scene in the last panel of page 37, which is actually cut to cut with the last page containing the same pose but in a tilted family photo frame. These two panels are interrupted by two absurd pages. The color is dominated by black and contains three panels containing cropped pieces of this family photo, overlaid vaguely with a picture of Cil turning into a Rooster Monster. These two absurd pages could be seen as a mess that separates the past: 'happy family poses on the beach,' from the present: 'family photos' that are about to be damaged. Family photos and recorded moments are depicted as essential elements in the story. The comic creator chooses the moment depicted as subjectively as possible, and the choice to display the drawing in the form of a photographic image makes it interpreted the same as the medium of photography, which is generally perceived to capture a real moment literally (Sacco, 2012)

Choosing to display photographic imagery in his comic work allows Merdeka (and also Winata) to determine what kind of photo object to display, at least as a choice of moments that support clarity in his comic story (McCloud, 2006). In this case, comic artists also act as 'photographers,' who, in creating 'photo' images, must have the intention to produce sensory, imaginative, and emotional effects displayed in a moment so that they are able to provide a message and not just a causal relationship (Susanto, 2017). If you trace the story of "Phagia," it tries to arouse the reader's emotions when you realize the dimensions of spatiality and temporality of family photos, namely 'there-then' this family: in the past, they went on a happy walk to the beach, and 'here-now': now Father and Mother have died, being devoured by the Rooster monster in the house.

Photos that show happiness in a damaged and neglected condition, strung together with a tragic story, can be seen as helpful in bringing out the punctum element in the family photos in "Phagia." The reader's feelings and emotions will play a role in interpreting this family photo, mainly because it is only the reader who interacts with the family photo offered by Merdeka. However, this family photo can also refer to the conclusion of the story as a happy memory and absence if it is based on the premise that "Father and Mother's illness (addiction) had to end, even by death, and now they are happy again." Likewise, Cil, whose transformation into a monster, was able to end the "pain" of his parents. The happy faces of these characters are presented to the reader, who will respond to the codes created by the comic artist according to their respective experiences at the end of the story "Phagia."

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that photographic images in independent comics were shown using the same artistic drawing style as the characters and objects in the story. Photographic imagery validates its nature as photography through its inherent photographic qualities. The inclusion of family photographs in comics aims to present a portrayal of the 'evidence,' 'truth,' and 'indexicality' as the genuine authenticity of the photographed moments in photography while also serving as a symbolic picture in storytelling. The readers' comprehension of the indexical nature of the family photograph is inherently linked to the manner in which the photographic imagery is portrayed and organized with other elements in the sequential composition of comics.

In comic communication, the domestic side of family photos is shown through scenes in the story. Meanwhile, compositionally, the photo is displayed publicly to the reader so that they can see the photo, find out the details, and respond affectively to the absence or change of figures when the reader sees the photo.

The advantage of comic media is its ability to be read in-depth and re-read by readers in parts that are deemed necessary, even though they are displayed in small and subtle ways in panels. Placing a vital family photography element at the end of the story, as in "Phagia," does not mean stopping the story because comic readers can trace the parts that they feel need to be repeated to get a complete reading experience.

To enhance the appeal, consumption, and appreciation of the comic medium, contemporary independent comics attempt to strengthen storytelling elements in visual narratives. One way to achieve this is by incorporating family photographic imagery, which allows comic artists to explore and experiment creatively further. When independent comic artists have complete creative authority, they can incorporate family photographic pictures into a very personal story that challenges societal taboos, challenges conventional norms, and disregards the rules imposed by established publishers.

This research is still limited to the cases studied, and the discussion carried out still focuses only on the indexicality of the family photograph in the comic. The exploration of independent comics related to photographic imageries can be researched further.

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