

Remembering through walls: Public memory, counter-visibility, and postcolonial narratives in Indonesian commemorative murals

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<i>Article history:</i> Received month dd, yyyy Revised month dd, yyyy Accepted month dd, yyyy <i>Keywords:</i> commemorative murals counter-visibility postcolonial narratives public memory visual culture	Indonesian commemorative murals have become contested public surfaces through which heroic nationalism, traumatic remembrance, local history, and unresolved demands for accountability are made visible. This study examines how commemorative murals construct public memory, redistribute visibility, and position postcolonial narratives between completed liberation and unfinished citizenship. Using a qualitative comparative design, this study analyses sixteen primary mural items documented across eight Indonesian provinces between 2014 and 2024, supported by five scholarly sources and four contextual documents, through a Public Memory–Spatial Salience Matrix, a Counter-Visibility and Visibility Contestation Grid, and a Postcolonial Narrative Positioning Framework. Findings show that official-national and community-national murals dominate mnemonic representation by translating founders, heroes, and independence struggles into civic pedagogy. Activist and traumatic murals instead mobilise accusation, mourning, victim naming, and evidentiary display to reopen unresolved political violence and institutional accountability. Vernacular and local-historical murals pluralise national memory through maritime histories, kampung authorship, and indigenous visual grammars, although some remain incorporated into heritage branding. This study introduces an integrated analytical model that treats commemorative murals simultaneously as visual compositions, spatial memory infrastructures, and postcolonial narrative interventions, thereby clarifying how mnemonic authority, representational inequality, and public visibility intersect within Indonesian urban culture across diverse institutional and community settings. <i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i> 

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia’s commemorative walls have become contested surfaces where official heroism, unresolved violence, and local histories compete for public visibility. This corpus documents sixteen murals and mural-based commemorative installations published between 12 May 2014 and 1 October 2024 across eight provinces, ranging from independence-themed hero portraits to works remembering Marsinah, Munir, Trisakti–May 1998, and Kanjuruhan. Their urgency lies in the asymmetry between public commemoration and institutional resolution. Komnas HAM recorded 135 deaths in the Kanjuruhan stadium disaster, while its documentation of May 1998 identifies at least 74 victims of rape and other sexual violence. Such cases remain embedded in Indonesia’s post-authoritarian memory landscape, where recognition frequently precedes accountability. Murals therefore do more than decorate urban space: they render absent bodies, suppressed claims, and historical authorities visible within circulation. Indonesian public memory is produced not only through monuments and museums, but also through walls vulnerable to removal, repainting, appropriation, and administrative reframing.

Existing scholarship has established a foundation for analysing visual politics. Dirgantoro (2020, 2021) shows how Indonesian art moves traumatic histories from silence toward witnessing and remembrance, while Eickhoff et al. (2017) demonstrate that memories of 1965 are dispersed and uneven. Arps (2023) argues that Indonesian mnemonic practices move across popular forms and require local conceptualisation. Research on murals has examined their capacity to carry memory (Krzywik, 2021), organise public meaning through prominence, place,

and colour (Marusek & Wagner, 2024), construct place identity (Irwandi et al., 2023), and enable reconciliation through iconographic transformation (Riyanto et al., 2023). Related studies have addressed contested memory in disaster monuments and museums (Nazaruddin, 2021; Prianti & Suyadnya, 2022). Yet these strands rarely connect commemorative murals, counter-visibility, and postcolonial narration within one Indonesian corpus. Less understood is how wall images distribute mnemonic authority among heroes, victims, activists, communities, and institutions across historical events and urban settings.

This study investigates how Indonesian commemorative murals construct public memory through visual form, textual inscription, and spatial placement. It asks three questions. First, which mnemonic regimes emerge when walls commemorate founders, independence heroes, political activists, victims of state violence, disaster casualties, and local urban histories? Second, through what visual and spatial strategies do murals challenge, revise, or remain absorbed within dominant regimes of visibility? Third, how do these works position Indonesia's postcolonial condition between completed liberation and unfinished citizenship? To answer these questions, this study combines a Public Memory–Spatial Salience Matrix, a Counter-Visibility and Visibility Contestation Grid, and a Postcolonial Narrative Positioning Framework. This design enables comparison without treating all political murals as inherently oppositional or assuming that public display produces uniform audience effects. It also distinguishes descriptive features—portraits, names, symbols, colours, scale, sequence, and location—from interpretive claims concerning authority, exclusion, accountability, and belonging, keeping evidence separate from theoretical explanation.

This study advances the argument that commemorative murals operate along a continuum rather than through a simple opposition between official memory and resistance. At one end, portraits of founders and national heroes stabilise decolonisation as a completed narrative transmitted through civic pedagogy. At another, murals of Munir, Marsinah, Trisakti–May 1998, and Kanjuruhan reopen history by attaching public visibility to unresolved death, gendered labour, victimhood, and demands for accountability. Between these positions, vernacular histories of Semarang and Peunayong reconfigure national belonging through local narrative forms, maritime exchange, and plural urban memory. This proposition draws on Jurriëns's (2021, 2023) account of post-New Order urban visibility and on Jaeka et al.'s (2025) analysis of heritage, memory politics, and postcolonial identity. Counter-visibility is expected to vary in intensity: it may accuse, mourn, pluralise, localise, or become incorporated into heritage branding. Walls thus constitute unstable mnemonic infrastructures where postcolonial authority is reproduced, negotiated, and unsettled.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public memory

Public memory refers to socially organised ways through which past events become publicly intelligible, affectively charged, and politically usable. It differs from collective memory because it emphasises arenas, institutions, media, and spatial practices through which remembrance is negotiated. Monument studies often treat memory as stabilised in durable sites, whereas recent work stresses mobility, performance, and contestation across popular forms (Arps, 2022, 2023). Indonesian scholarship shows that memory is dispersed across monuments, museums, urban landscapes, and contemporary art rather than contained within official archives (Eickhoff et al., 2017; Dirgantoro, 2020, 2021; Nazaruddin, 2021). Public memory is therefore relational, situated, and unevenly authorised.

Its principal dimensions include mnemonic actors, commemorated subjects, spatial location, material form, institutional sponsorship, temporal repetition, and degrees of public visibility. Studies of Aceh, Timor-Leste, and Indonesian monuments demonstrate that memorial meaning changes according to ritual use, political framing, and competing claims of victims, states, and communities (Kent, 2019, 2020; Rahman et al., 2023, 2024; Sabila et al., 2024). Research on urban murals adds prominence, colour, scale, sequence, accessibility, and everyday circulation as analytic indicators (Krzywik, 2021; Marusek & Wagner, 2024). Accordingly, public memory should be examined as a spatially organised field where authority, affect, recognition, and legitimacy intersect.

Counter-visibility

Counter-visibility designates practices that challenge dominant arrangements of who may be seen, how events become legible, and which histories acquire public credibility. It is narrower than resistance art because opposition may arise through visibility rather than explicit protest. Some scholarship emphasises direct contestation,

including witnessing, accusation, and traumatic disclosure (Dirgantoro, 2020, 2021), while other studies foreground vernacular reframing, participatory art, and local identity formation (Irwandi et al., 2023; Jurriëns, 2021, 2023). Counter-visibility therefore ranges from confrontational exposure to quieter redistribution of representational authority. Its analytical value lies in distinguishing oppositional images from politically themed murals that leave dominant memory regimes intact.

Relevant indicators include subject displacement, victim naming, accusatory language, forensic symbols, vernacular aesthetics, participatory production, unofficial placement, and narrative contradiction. Murals can counter dominant visibility by centring workers, victims, minorities, or local communities excluded from monumental history; by transforming walls into evidence-bearing surfaces; or by revising heroic narratives through plural cultural forms. Studies of reconciliation murals in Solo, multicultural community murals, and museum invisibility show that counter-visual practice may resist and become institutionally absorbed (Riyanto et al., 2023; Oentoro et al., 2025; Prianti et al., 2025). Counter-visibility must therefore be coded by degree, mechanism, and evidence rather than assumed automatically.

Postcolonial narratives

Postcolonial narratives concern how colonial domination, decolonisation, national sovereignty, and continuing hierarchies are represented within cultural discourse. One approach treats postcoloniality as historical aftermath, emphasising independence, anti-colonial struggle, and national integration (Purnomo et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2024). Another understands it as an unfinished structure visible in museums, heritage, aesthetics, and identity politics (Prianti & Suyadnya, 2022; Jaeka et al., 2025; Prianti & Athique, 2025). Indonesian visual culture reveals tensions between authenticity, urban modernity, and inherited representational orders (Aryandari, 2025; Jurriëns, 2023). Postcolonial narrative is neither celebration nor critique alone, but positioning within competing temporalities of liberation and persistence.

Its major indicators include completed-liberation stories, founder-centred nationalism, unresolved state violence, subaltern citizenship, local historical authority, cultural authenticity, plural belonging, and heritage commodification. Monumental and museum research shows how postcolonial identities are produced through selective visibility and institutional ordering (Afandi & Febriansyah, 2025; Prianti & Suyadnya, 2022; Riyanto et al., 2025). Studies of disaster memorialisation, diaspora nationalism, and community murals demonstrate that belonging can widen while remaining shaped by tourism, branding, or official supervision (Mahaswa & Hardiyanti, 2025; Mayestika et al., 2025; Nursanty et al., 2025). This study positions commemorative murals where memory, visibility, and postcolonial authority are jointly negotiated.

METHOD

This study examines twenty-five publicly verifiable documents concerning Indonesian commemorative murals. Its primary analytical units are sixteen mural or mural-based commemorative items documented across Aceh, Banten, Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, Southeast Sulawesi, and West Sulawesi between 2014 and 2024. Each item is treated as a multimodal unit comprising image, caption, textual inscription, location, date, commemorated subject, institutional framing, and spatial context. Five peer-reviewed articles provide secondary analytical support, while four contextual documents clarify anniversary practices, official narratives, and memory activism. This composition enables comparison across heroic, traumatic, activist, vernacular, and local-cosmopolitan mnemonic regimes within Indonesian public culture.

This study adopts a qualitative comparative design combining visual-semiotic analysis, spatial memory analysis, and critical discourse interpretation. Comparison is organised across cases rather than around a single city or commemorative event, allowing differences in mnemonic authority, visibility, and postcolonial narration to be examined without claiming national representativeness. Murals are analysed as situated public texts whose meanings emerge through interactions among imagery, wording, placement, scale, commissioning status, and documentary framing. This design follows recent approaches that treat public art as both visual form and spatial practice, while remaining sensitive to Indonesian scholarship on trauma, monuments, urban vernacularity, and post-authoritarian memory comparatively.

Information was drawn from ANTARA News and its regional portals, official municipal and provincial government websites, Kompas, detikNews, Inside Indonesia, and peer-reviewed journal platforms. These sources were selected because they provide stable publication dates, identifiable institutional provenance, accessible

captions, synopses, and retrievable URLs. Primary sources supplied visual and contextual evidence for each mural, whereas secondary literature supported conceptual interpretation of public memory, counter-visibility, and postcolonial narratives. Context documents were used only to establish event histories, institutional framing, or commemorative practices. Social-media reposts, anonymous image aggregators, and inaccessible pages were excluded because their provenance and metadata could not be independently verified.

Data collection proceeded through structured searches using Indonesian and English keywords, including mural, peringatan, mengenang, melawan lupa, pahlawan, kemerdekaan, Trisakti, Mei 1998, Marsinah, Munir, Kanjuruhan, sejarah kota, commemorative mural, public memory, and counter-memory. Retrieved items were screened against four criteria: public accessibility, explicit mnemonic content, identifiable Indonesian location, and sufficient metadata for coding. Each included document received a unique identifier and was entered into linked metadata, text, and coding files. Duplicate wire-service mirrors were grouped through duplicate labels and retained only once. Captions, short quotations, dates, URLs, visual descriptions, transcripts, and screenshot references were preserved for transparent analytical traceability overall.

Analysis followed three sequential instruments. First, a Public Memory–Spatial Salience Matrix coded commemorated subjects, memory regimes, placement, scale, seriality, and prominence. Second, a Counter-Visibility and Visibility Contestation Grid identified accusation, mourning, subaltern recognition, vernacular reframing, pluralisation, or absorption into dominant imagery. Third, a Postcolonial Narrative Positioning Framework examined completed liberation, founder-centred nationalism, unfinished citizenship, impunity, labour marginalisation, plural maritime history, and heritage commodification. Coding moved from description to interpretation, with confidence levels recorded for every category. Cross-case comparison then identified convergences, contrasts, and hybrid positions, while avoiding causal claims about audience reception or social impact beyond available documentary evidence alone.

Table 1. Composition of Primary Dataset

Cod e	Data type	Public source	Location	Date	Commemorati ve subject	Visual-spatial characteristic s	Mnemonic status
ICM - PRI-001	Photo report	ANTARA Bangka Belitung	East Jakarta	12 May 2014	Trisakti and May 1998 violence	Participatory memorial wall; public inauguration	Activist counter-memory
ICM - PRI-002	Photo report	ANTARA News	Cikarang, West Java	1 May 2019	Marsinah and labour rights	Roadside activist portrait; May Day circulation	Subaltern labour memory
ICM - PRI-003	Photo feature	detikNews	South Jakarta	7 September 2020	Munir Said Thalib	Portrait, aircraft motif, accusatory inscription	Forensic counter-memory
ICM - PRI-004	Photo report	ANTARA News	North Jakarta	10 August 2020	National heroes and independence	Extended roadside heroic mural	Official-national memory
ICM - PRI-005	Video report	ANTARA News	Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi	14 August 2020	Independence struggle	Forty-five-metre collective mural	Institutional patriotic memory
ICM - PRI-006	Photo report	ANTARA News	Tangerang, Banten	5 April 2021	National heroes	Grouped public portraits; educational framing	Heroic didactic memory
ICM -	Photo report	ANTARA News	Surakarta, Central Java	9 August 2022	Independence heroes	Resident-produced	Community-national memory

PRI-007						neighbourhood mural	
ICM - PRI-008	Video report	ANTARA News	Cimahi, West Java	15 August 2022	Heroes, wayang, and endemic fauna	Sequential alley murals; hybrid iconography	Vernacular nationalism
ICM - PRI-009	Photo report	ANTARA Makassar	Mamuju, West Sulawesi	18 August 2022	Independence and national heroes	Artist-led neighbourhood mural	Aesthetic civic nationalism
ICM - PRI-010	News photograph	ANTARA East Java	Malang, East Java	14 October 2022	Kanjuruhan victims	Rapid post-event roadside memorial	Traumatic public memory
ICM - PRI-011	Photo report	ANTARA News	Bogor, West Java	9 August 2023	Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta	Paired monumental founder portraits	Founder-centred memory
ICM - PRI-012	Video report	ANTARA News	Bogor, West Java	9 November 2023	Historical and contemporary heroes	130-metre segmented mural wall	Expanded civic heroism
ICM - PRI-013	Photo report	ANTARA News	Malang, East Java	1 October 2024	135 Kanjuruhan victims	Mural, names, photographs, video, and remains	Multimodal traumatic memory
ICM - PRI-014	News report	ANTARA Aceh	Banda Aceh	4 July 2019	Peunayong's trade and plural history	Thirty-two-site neighbourhood mural cycle	Local cosmopolitan memory
ICM - PRI-015	News report	Kompas	Semarang, Central Java	2 May 2017	Founding history of Semarang	Wayang-beber-like sequential narrative	Vernacular urban memory
ICM - PRI-016	Government report	Central Java Provincial Government	Salatiga, Central Java	2 November 2018	National struggle and local figures	Distributed tourism-village murals	Heritage-mediated memory

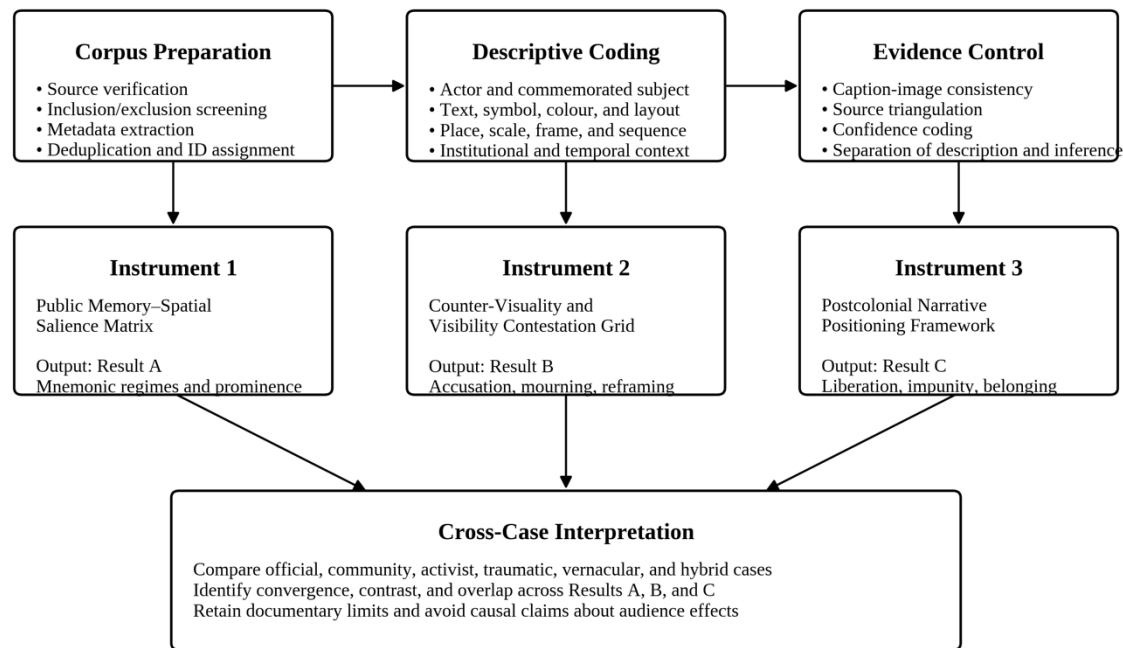


Figure 2. Operational analysis matrix

RESULTS

Mnemonic Regimes and Spatial Organisation of Commemorative Murals

Public remembrance across these murals is organised through six mnemonic regimes rather than through a single opposition between official commemoration and resistance. Official-national and community-national forms each account for four items, or 25% of this corpus, while activist counter-memory represents three items, or 18.75%. Traumatic memory and vernacular or local-historical memory each comprise two items, whereas hybrid national-popular memory appears once. Such distribution shows that Indonesian walls accommodate both authorised historical narratives and less institutionally secure forms of remembrance. Differences emerge through commemorated subjects, spatial placement, production actors, visual scale, and textual inscription. Accordingly, public memory operates as a differentiated spatial field in which founders, heroes, activists, victims, workers, and local communities receive unequal forms of representational prominence.

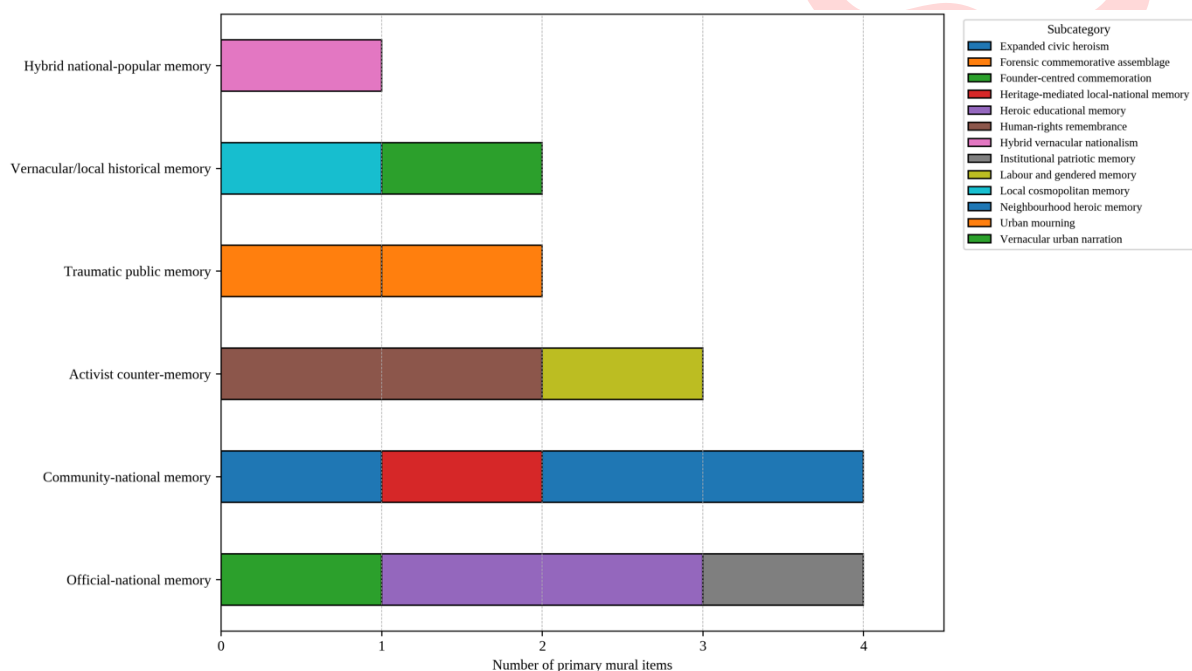
Table 2. Distribution of Public-Memory Regimes in Indonesian Commemorative Murals

Main category	Subcategory	Principal indicators	Frequency	Percentage	Data variation	Illustrative expression	Data code
Official-national memory	Founder-centred commemoration	Paired founder portraits; independence anniversary; monumental arrangement	1	6.25%	Founding-father iconography	“menumbuhkan rasa nasionalisme”	ICM - PRI-011
Official-national memory	Heroic educational memory	National heroes; public pedagogy;	2	12.50%	Roadside and grouped portraits	“media untuk mengingat sejarah perjuangan	ICM - PRI-004;

		recognisable portraiture				bangsa”; “sarana edukasi”	ICM - PRI- 006
Official- national memory	Institutional patriotic memory	Collective production; cultural institution; independence theme	1	6.25%	Long-form commemorative wall	“lukisan mural bertema perjuangan”	ICM - PRI- 005
Community- national memory	Neighbourhood heroic memory	Resident production; annual ritual; civic beautification	2	12.50%	Solo and Mamuju neighbourhoods	“meneladani perjuangan para pahlawan”	ICM - PRI- 007; ICM - PRI- 009
Community- national memory	Expanded civic heroism	Historical and contemporary heroes; collective wall; public event	1	6.25%	130-metre segmented mural	“mengisi kemerdekaan melalui seni dan budaya”	ICM - PRI- 012
Community- national memory	Heritage- mediated local-national memory	National struggle; local figures; tourism- village framing	1	6.25%	Distributed kampung murals	“sejarah perjuangan Bangsa Indonesia”	ICM - PRI- 016
Activist counter- memory	Human-rights remembrance	Anti- forgetting discourse; victim orientation; accusatory symbolism	2	12.50%	Participatory wall and forensic portrait	“gerakan melawan lupa”; “Diracun Di Udara”	ICM - PRI- 001; ICM - PRI- 003
Activist counter- memory	Labour and gendered memory	Female worker activist; May Day timing; roadside portrait	1	6.25%	Industrial and roadside circulation	“mengenang jasanya”	ICM - PRI- 002
Traumatic public memory	Urban mourning	Rapid post- event production; grief; central street placement	1	6.25%	Immediate post-disaster intervention	“ungkapan duka dan keprihatinan”	ICM - PRI- 010
Traumatic public memory	Forensic commemorative assemblage	Victim names; mural; photographs; video;	1	6.25%	Curated anniversary exhibition	“mengenang 135 korban”	ICM - PRI- 013

		material remains					
Vernacular/local historical memory	Local cosmopolitan memory	Trade; migration; ethnic and religious plurality	1	6.25%	Thirty-two-site neighbourhood cycle	“mengangkat kembali Peunayong tempo dulu”	ICM - PRI-014
Vernacular/local historical memory	Vernacular urban narration	Sequential history; local visual grammar; resident authorship	1	6.25%	Wayang-beber-like mural sequence	“babad cerita sejarah Kota Semarang”	ICM - PRI-015
Hybrid national-popular memory	Hybrid vernacular nationalism	Heroes; wayang figures; endemic fauna	1	6.25%	Serial alley-based murals	“mencerminkan Indonesia”	ICM - PRI-008

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Figure 3 – Distribution of mnemonic regimes and subcategories

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Heroic memory constitutes the most recurrent orientation when official-national and community-national categories are considered together. Eight of sixteen items depict founders, national heroes, independence struggles, or civic successors to heroic traditions. Within this group, portrait-based murals generally employ recognisable individuals and didactic language, while neighbourhood projects translate patriotic remembrance into collective wall painting, beautification, and annual ritual. By contrast, activist and traumatic murals rely more heavily on victim-centred portraits, accusatory wording, anti-forgetting statements, names, photographs, and material remains. Local-historical works differ again by using distributed mural cycles and sequential vernacular narration. These patterns indicate that visual prominence is not determined only by image size; it is also produced through repetition, location, recognisability, textual anchoring, and relationships between murals and everyday public movement.

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This distribution supports an understanding of public memory as negotiated rather than merely preserved. Hero portraits reproduce what Marusek and Wagner (2024) describe as mnemonic prominence through place and visual

organisation, while community production localises nationally authorised memory without necessarily challenging its ideological structure. Activist murals function differently: their inscriptions, victim-centred imagery, and forensic symbols interrupt consensual narratives by making unresolved violence publicly visible, consistent with Dirgantoro's (2020, 2021) account of visual witnessing. Peunayong and Semarang further demonstrate that counter-memory need not always appear as direct protest; plural maritime histories and vernacular narrative forms redistribute historical authority toward local communities, as suggested by Jurriëns (2023) and Irwandi et al. (2023). Public walls therefore operate as layered mnemonic infrastructures where official history, civic pedagogy, grief, accusation, and local belonging coexist without becoming equivalent.

Counter-Visuality and the Redistribution of Public Visibility

Public visibility across this corpus is distributed through four levels of contestation rather than divided neatly between resistance and conformity. Five murals, representing 31.25% of all primary items, display high contestation through accusation, subaltern recognition, public mourning, or evidence-bearing memorialisation. Four items, or 25%, moderately revise authorised visibility through vernacular narration, historical pluralisation, hybrid symbolism, or expanded civic heroism. Three murals, accounting for 18.75%, localise national memory without substantially challenging its ideological organisation. Four items, or 25%, remain absorbed within dominant heroic visibility. Counter-visibility therefore appears as a graded relation between image, text, subject position, institutional framing, and spatial circulation, not as an inherent property of every political or commemorative mural.

Table 3. Forms and Intensities of Counter-Visuality in Indonesian Commemorative Murals

Main category	Subcategory	Principal indicators	Frequency	Percentage	Data variation	Illustrative expression	Data code
Direct accusation	Anti-forgetting claim	Explicit textual challenge to unresolved violence	2	12.50%	Participatory memorial wall; forensic portrait	"gerakan melawan lupa"; "Diracun Di Udara"	IC M-PRI-001; IC M-PRI-003
Subaltern recognition	Labour and gendered visibility	Marginalised worker elevated as commemorative subject	1	6.25%	Female activist portrait in industrial circulation	"mengenang jasanya"	IC M-PRI-002
Counter-public mourning	Urban grief	Victim-oriented mural inserted into everyday public movement	1	6.25%	Roadside memorial following Kanjuruhan	"ungkapan duka dan keprihatinan"	IC M-PRI-010
Counter-forensic memorialisation	Evidence-bearing remembrance	Names, images, video, and material remains combined	1	6.25%	Curated commemorative exhibition	"mengenang 135 korban"	IC M-PRI-013
Vernacular reframing	Local visual authority	Historical narrative expressed through local	1	6.25%	Wayang-beber-like sequential composition	"babad cerita sejarah Kota Semarang"	IC M-PRI-015

		visual grammar					
Historical pluralisation	Local cosmopolitan memory	Trade, migration, and plurality displace homogeneous history	1	6.25%	Thirty-two-site Peunayong mural cycle	“mengangkat kembali Peunayong tempo dulu”	IC M-PRI -014
Vernacular re-articulation	Hybrid national-popular imagery	National symbols combined with wayang and endemic fauna	1	6.25%	Serial alley-based murals	“mencerminkan Indonesia”	IC M-PRI -008
Moderate reframing	Expanded civic heroism	Heroic category widened beyond armed struggle	1	6.25%	130-metre collective mural	“mengisi kemerdekaan melalui seni dan budaya”	IC M-PRI -012
Limited vernacularisation	Neighbourhood national memory	Community authorship localises dominant narratives	3	18.75%	Resident-produced and heritage-supported murals	“meneladani perjuangan para pahlawan”; “sejarah perjuangan Bangsa Indonesia”	IC M-PRI -007; IC M-PRI -009; IC M-PRI -016
Absorbed dominant visibility	Official heroic imagery	Founders, heroes, and patriotic struggle remain uncontested	4	25.00%	Portrait-led and institutionally framed patriotic murals	“media untuk mengingat sejarah perjuangan bangsa”; “sarana edukasi”	IC M-PRI -004; IC M-PRI -005; IC M-PRI -006; IC M-PRI -011

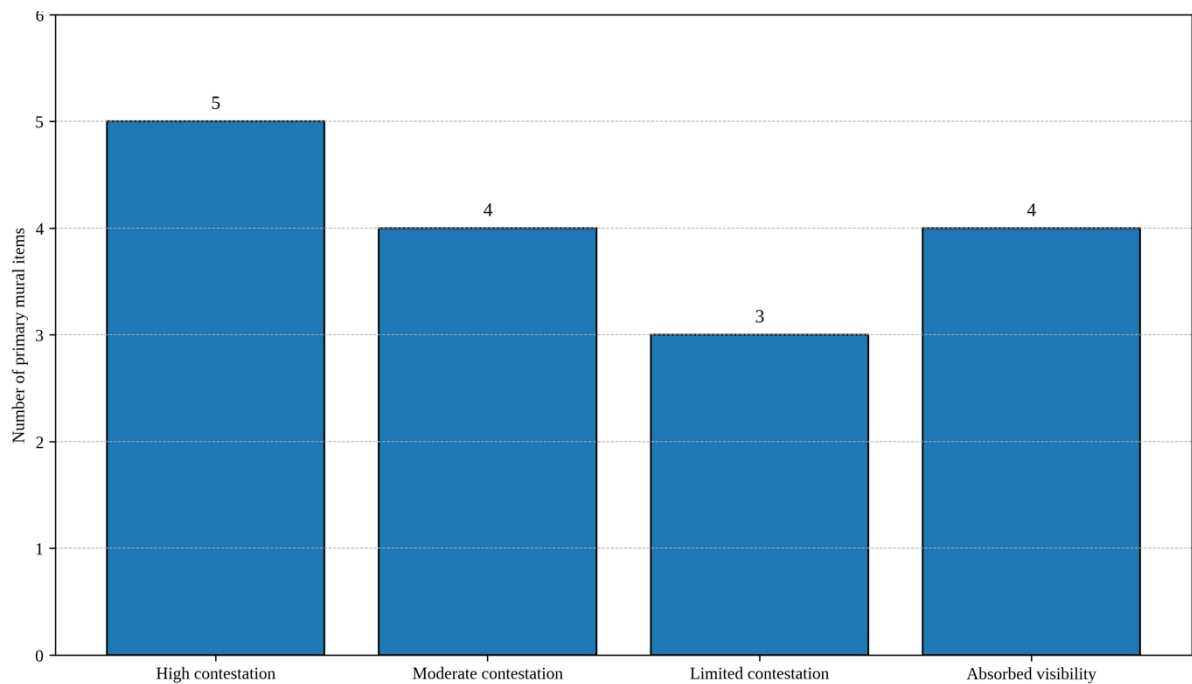


Figure 4 – Distribution of counter-visibility intensity (n = 16)

Directly confrontational works form a compact but visually distinctive cluster. Trisakti–May 1998 and Munir murals combine portraiture or public-wall inscription with explicit anti-forgetting and accusatory language, while Marsinah’s roadside image relocates a female worker into commemorative space usually reserved for state heroes. Kanjuruhan murals mobilise a different repertoire: immediate roadside mourning establishes public grief, whereas anniversary exhibition materials combine names, images, video, and physical remains. Moderate cases do not accuse an identifiable authority but alter who may narrate history. Peunayong pluralises urban origins through migration and commerce, Semarang adopts a wayang-beber-like visual sequence, and Cimahi combines heroes with wayang and endemic animals. Their intervention lies in reframing visibility rather than openly opposing official memory.

These patterns refine counter-visibility as a relational and evidence-dependent concept. Accusatory inscriptions and forensic symbols correspond with Dirgantoro’s (2020, 2021) account of visual art as witnessing that interrupts silence around political violence. Victim names and material remnants also convert commemoration into a claim to historical credibility, making absence publicly verifiable rather than merely symbolic. Yet Jurriëns (2023) and Irwandi et al. (2023) indicate that visual contestation may also emerge through vernacular authorship and place-based participation. Peunayong and Semarang exemplify this quieter redistribution of mnemonic authority. Conversely, community production alone does not ensure opposition: several neighbourhood murals reproduce national heroic narratives despite local authorship. Counter-visibility is therefore best understood through what becomes visible, which narrative is displaced, and how strongly dominant historical authority is unsettled.

Postcolonial Narratives between Completed Liberation and Unfinished Citizenship

Postcolonial narration across this corpus is organised around competing temporal understandings of independence. Four murals, representing 25% of primary items, frame liberation as an accomplished national achievement embodied by founders, heroes, and exemplary struggle. Another four items, also 25%, popularise this narrative through neighbourhood participation, expanded civic heroism, and hybrid vernacular symbols. Five murals, or 31.25%, position citizenship as unfinished by foregrounding political impunity, labour marginalisation, institutional violence, and unresolved victimhood. Two items, accounting for 12.50%, recover plural local histories, while one heritage-oriented mural represents 6.25%. Postcoloniality therefore appears neither as a single historical period nor as an exclusively critical position, but as a field where completed sovereignty and persistent inequality coexist.

Main category	Subcategory	Principal indicators	Frequency	Percentage	Data variation	Illustrative expression	Data code
Completed liberation narrative	Founder-centred nationalism	Independence personalised through national founders; anti-colonial struggle presented as accomplished	1	6.25%	Paired monumental portraits	“menumbuhkan rasa nasionalisme”	ICM - PRI-011
Completed liberation narrative	Heroic civic pedagogy	National heroes and struggle figures used as exemplary models for citizens	3	18.75%	Roadside portraits; grouped heroes; cultural-wall project	“media untuk mengingat sejarah perjuangan bangsa”; “sarana edukasi”; “lukisan mural bertema perjuangan”	ICM - PRI-004; ICM - PRI-005; ICM - PRI-006
Popularised national continuity	Neighbourhood nationalism	Residents reproduce heroic memory through annual ritual and civic beautification	2	12.50%	Solo and Mamuju neighbourhood murals	“meneladani perjuangan para pahlawan”	ICM - PRI-007; ICM - PRI-009
Popularised national continuity	Expanded civic heroism	Heroism extends from armed struggle to current civic-cultural contribution	1	6.25%	130-metre segmented community mural	“mengisi kemerdekaan melalui seni dan budaya”	ICM - PRI-012
Popularised national continuity	Hybrid vernacular belonging	National heroes combined with wayang and endemic fauna	1	6.25%	Serial alley-based mural environment	“mencerminkan Indonesia”	ICM - PRI-008
Unfinished citizenship	Post-authoritarian impunity	Unresolved political violence and human-rights death made publicly visible	2	12.50%	Anti-forgetting wall; forensic activist portrait	“gerakan melawan lupa”; “Diracun Di Udara”	ICM - PRI-001; ICM - PRI-003

Unfinished citizenship	Labour and gendered citizenship	Female worker activist becomes a public mnemonic subject	1	6.25%	Roadside Marsinah portrait in an industrial setting	“mengenang jasanya”	ICM - PRI-002
Unfinished citizenship	Institutional violence and public mourning	Victim loss, grief, names, and material evidence challenge depersonalised narratives	2	12.50%	Urban Kanjuruhan mural; multimodal anniversary exhibition	“ungkapan duka dan keprihatinan”; “mengenang 135 korban”	ICM - PRI-010; ICM - PRI-013
Plural local postcoloniality	Maritime cosmopolitan history	Trade, migration, ethnic plurality, and religious diversity foregrounded	1	6.25%	Thirty-two-site Peunayong mural cycle	“mengangkat kembali Peunayong tempo dulu”	ICM - PRI-014
Plural local postcoloniality	Vernacular urban authority	City history narrated through local sequential visual grammar	1	6.25%	Wayang-beber-like Semarang mural sequence	“babad cerita sejarah Kota Semarang”	ICM - PRI-015
Heritage-mediated postcoloniality	Tourism and local-national synthesis	National struggle and local figures incorporated into a thematic tourism village	1	6.25%	Distributed Kampung Pancuran murals	“sejarah perjuangan Bangsa Indonesia”	ICM - PRI-016

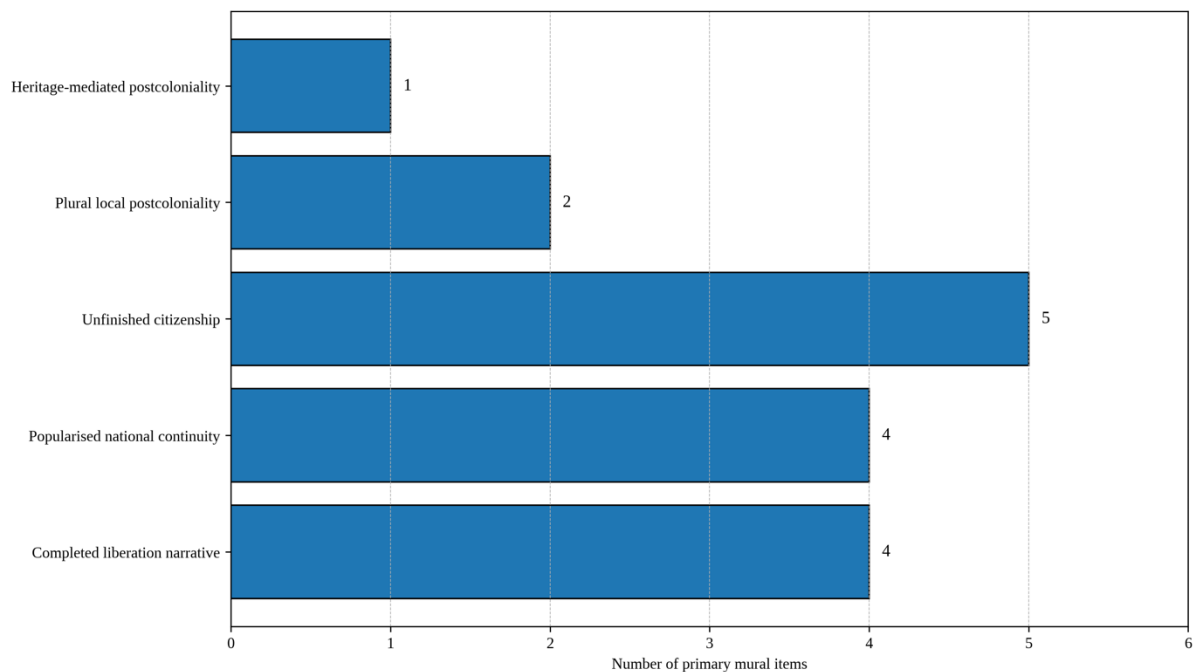


Figure 5 – Distribution of postcolonial narrative positions (n = 16)

Completed-liberation murals rely primarily on founders, national heroes, struggle imagery, and pedagogical expressions that present independence as a settled moral inheritance. Community-produced works preserve this orientation but alter its spatial delivery by moving national history into alleys, neighbourhood walls, and collective commemorative events. In contrast, murals concerning Trisakti–May 1998, Munir, Marsinah, and Kanjuruhan emphasise experiences that cannot be contained by triumphant independence narratives. Their iconography centres accusation, victimhood, work, gender, death, and institutional accountability. Peunayong and Semarang occupy a distinct position: neither rejects national history directly, yet both widen historical authorship through maritime plurality and vernacular narrative forms. Kampung Pancuran similarly incorporates local memory, although its tourism-village context places remembrance within organised heritage development.

These differences demonstrate that postcolonial narratives are structured by tensions between sovereignty, historical authority, and unequal citizenship. Founder-centred murals correspond with narratives in which colonial domination ends through national liberation and exemplary leadership, a pattern also visible in research on anti-colonial historical pedagogy and monumental identity (Purnomo et al., 2024; Afandi & Febriansyah, 2025). Activist and traumatic works complicate this closure by revealing continuities of violence and exclusion, consistent with Dirgantoro's (2020, 2021) analysis of post-authoritarian witnessing. Meanwhile, plural and vernacular murals support Jaeka et al.'s (2025) argument that postcolonial identity is produced through contested heritage and spatial memory. Indonesian commemorative walls thus position independence simultaneously as achieved sovereignty, inherited public narrative, and an unfinished demand for equitable recognition.

DISCUSSION

The distribution of mnemonic regimes indicates that commemorative murals function as uneven infrastructures of public remembrance rather than neutral records of shared history. Their principal contribution lies in making pasts available through visual grammars: founders are monumentalised, heroes are pedagogically repeated, victims are named, and local communities narrate histories excluded from official monuments. Yet this plurality also exposes dysfunction. When heroic and community-national forms dominate, public memory risks becoming affirmative but politically shallow, privileging exemplary figures over unresolved violence. By contrast, activist and traumatic murals preserve conflict, grief, and accountability as legitimate public concerns. This supports Marusek and Wagner's (2024) emphasis on prominence, place, and colour, while extending Krzywik's (2021) view of murals as memory carriers by showing that carriage is selective and hierarchical. Public walls therefore do not simply preserve memory; they distribute mnemonic legitimacy, determining which histories appear settled, which remain disputable, and which must struggle for visibility.

This unevenness can be explained by the institutional and spatial structures through which murals are produced. Officially compatible murals benefit from anniversaries, recognisable heroes, civic pedagogy, and locations where national symbolism is legible. Their repetition across neighbourhoods converts state memory into visual culture, echoing Irwandi et al.'s (2023) account of participatory art as place-making. However, participation does not automatically decentralise historical authority, because community production may reproduce authorised narratives than formal monuments. Activist murals operate under different conditions: they depend on anniversaries of violence, rights-based networks, grief, and symbolic condensation capable of communicating complex claims. Dirgantoro (2020, 2021) similarly shows that Indonesian visual art moves traumatic memory from silence toward witnessing, but this corpus suggests that such movement remains structurally asymmetric. Mnemonic plurality emerges not from equal access to public space, but from unequal negotiations among institutional sponsorship, vernacular authorship, media visibility, and the risks attached to particular pasts.

The graded pattern of counter-visibility has important implications for how visual resistance should be understood. Counter-visibility does not arise whenever a mural addresses politics; it emerges when an image redistributes visibility, repositions marginalised subjects, or interrupts established historical closure. Direct accusation, public mourning, and evidence-bearing memorialisation perform a function by transforming walls into sites where unresolved claims remain present. Yet counter-visibility can also become diluted. Community murals may localise national imagery without challenging its ideological assumptions, while heritage projects may convert difference into aesthetic diversity stripped of conflict. This finding supports Jurriëns's (2023) account of vernacular urban visibility but complicates celebratory readings of participatory art. It also aligns with Prianti et al. (2025), who show that visibility is politically organised rather than merely expanded. Counter-visibility is therefore best treated as a relation between representational access and narrative disruption, not as a fixed attribute of unofficial, community-based, or visually striking art.

The underlying structure of this variation lies in differing relationships among subject position, textual anchoring, material evidence, and institutional absorption. Accusatory murals gain force because portraits, phrases, and symbols specify who was harmed and why memory remains unsettled. Kanjuruhan commemoration intensifies this mechanism through names, photographs, video, and material remains, producing what may be called evidentiary visibility. By contrast, heroic murals rely on culturally saturated symbols whose meanings require little explanation and therefore circulate easily within civic and media frameworks. This asymmetry helps explain why some images contest dominant memory while others reinforce it despite similar public placement. Riyanto et al. (2023) demonstrate that murals can contribute to reconciliation, yet this corpus suggests that reconciliation depends on whether conflict is represented as unresolved, transformed, or already overcome. Counter-visibility weakens when institutions absorb dissenting forms without preserving their claims. Its intensity therefore correlates with specificity, accountability, and resistance to depoliticising reinterpretation.

The coexistence of completed-liberation narratives and unfinished-citizenship narratives reframes postcolonial memory as a temporal struggle. Heroic murals function by presenting independence as achieved sovereignty transmitted through founders, sacrifice, and civic emulation. Their social value lies in sustaining historical continuity and recognisable shared national belonging. Their limitation lies in converting decolonisation into closure, thereby leaving post-authoritarian violence, labour inequality, gendered exclusion, and institutional failure outside the central national story of freedom. Activist and traumatic murals reopen this closure by showing that political independence did not guarantee equal protection, recognition, or accountability. This interpretation corresponds with Prianti and Suyadnya's (2022) argument that postcolonial representation remains organised through inherited visual orders. It also supports Jaeka et al. (2025), who locate postcolonial identity within contested heritage rather than settled national consensus. Indonesian commemorative walls therefore reveal postcoloniality as a negotiation between formally achieved statehood and incomplete citizenship, not merely as remembrance of colonial domination.

This tension persists because Indonesian public history is structured by overlapping regimes of nation-building, post-authoritarian memory, local identity, and heritage development. Founder-centred narratives remain powerful because they offer coherence, recognisable symbols, and pedagogical clarity. Unfinished-citizenship narratives are more disruptive because they connect past violence to present-day institutional responsibility. Local cosmopolitan and vernacular histories occupy an intermediate position: they decentralise national history by foregrounding maritime exchange, kampung authorship, and plural belonging, yet they may also be incorporated into tourism and branding. Nazaruddin (2021) similarly demonstrates that memorial meaning is contested through institutional framing, while Mahaswa and Hardiyanti (2025) show that memorialisation can reorganise post-disaster historical consciousness. This corpus extends those arguments by showing that postcolonial narratives are shaped by who controls visibility, which temporal frame is privileged, and whether local historical difference

remains politically consequential. Postcolonial memory endures through these unresolved negotiations rather than through a single dominant national historical narrative.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian commemorative murals operate as contested mnemonic infrastructures where heroic nationalism, traumatic remembrance, vernacular history, and demands for accountability coexist without becoming equivalent. Its central lesson is that public memory depends not only on what is depicted, but also on who gains visibility, where images circulate, and how institutions frame meaning. By integrating a Public Memory–Spatial Salience Matrix, a Counter-Visibility and Visibility Contestation Grid, and a Postcolonial Narrative Positioning Framework, this study contributes a comparative method for examining murals as visual, spatial, and political texts while refining questions of memory authority, representational inequality, and unfinished citizenship.

This study remains limited by its reliance on publicly accessible documentation, uneven visual detail, and a corpus that cannot represent Indonesia’s regional, linguistic, or historical diversity. Media captions and institutional webpages also constrain interpretation because they do not capture production negotiations, audience reception, alteration, removal, or everyday interaction with mural sites. Future research should combine longitudinal photographic documentation, onsite observation, creator and community interviews, audience studies, and geospatial mapping across additional provinces. Comparative work should examine digital recirculation, censorship, repainting, tourism appropriation, and multilingual inscriptions to determine how commemorative murals change meaning across platforms, political moments, and local memory communities.

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