

The Construction of Forgetfulness: Media Framing as an Instrument to Erase Traces of Human Rights Violations in Prabowo Subianto's Image

Received: 13-07-2025

Revised: 16-07-2025

Accepted: 13-10-2025

Muhammad Rafiq

Meilandi *)

Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN)

Sunan Kalijaga

E-mail: rapikmeilandi@gmail.com

Abstract: This study discusses how mainstream media constructs Prabowo Subianto's image through a systematic framing strategy, especially in the context of his track record of past human rights violations and the transformation of his political image since 2014. The main focus of this study is directed at how history is reconstructed through media coverage to form the public's collective memory of image Prabowo Subianto, who now occupies an important position in national politics. Using a qualitative approach through literature study, this study combines the theories of Framing (Entman), Social Construction (Berger & Luckmann), and Collective Memory (Halbwachs & Ricoeur) to analyze the dynamics of the media in shaping public perceptions related to the chosen focus of the problem. The results of this study show that mass media has a central role in reconstructing Prabowo Subianto's image. This process takes place through mainstream media framing strategies that consistently simplify, obscure, and even divert the dark past narrative, while establishing a new persona that suits the needs of contemporary Indonesian politics.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini membahas tentang bagaimana media arus utama mengkonstruksi citra Prabowo Subianto melalui strategi framing yang sistematis, khususnya dalam konteks rekam jejak pelanggaran HAM masa lalu dan transformasi citra politiknya sejak 2014. Fokus utama penelitian ini diarahkan pada bagaimana sejarah direkonstruksi melalui pemberitaan media untuk membentuk memori kolektif masyarakat terhadap citra Prabowo Subianto, yang saat ini menempati posisi penting dalam politik nasional. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka, penelitian ini menggabungkan teori Framing (Entman), Konstruksi Sosial (Berger & Luckmann), dan Memori Kolektif (Halbwachs & Ricoeur) untuk menganalisis dinamika media dalam membentuk persepsi masyarakat terkait dengan fokus permasalahan yang dipilih. Hasil Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa media massa memiliki peran sentral dalam merekonstruksi citra Prabowo Subianto. Proses ini berlangsung melalui strategi framing media arus utama yang secara konsisten menyederhanakan, mengaburkan, bahkan mengalihkan narasi masa lalu yang kelam, sembari memperkuat persona baru yang sesuai dengan kebutuhan politik kontemporer Indonesia.

*) *Corresponding Author*

Keywords: Media Framing, Prabowo, Political Image, Social Construction, Collective Memory.

INTRODUCTION

The media has a central role in shaping people's perceptions of an event.(Izza, 2023) As the main channel for delivering information, the media not only reflects reality, but also constructs meanings that can strengthen or distort the image of an object that has been framed by media actors, either for the sake of sensationalism, the interests of the hierarchy of the media company, or the interests of partisanship that have been built before or shortly after a reported event is released to the public domain.(Mochammad Fauzan Amin et al.,2022) The issue must have been arranged in advance by media actors, in order to be able to present the interpretation they want when it reaches the ears of the intended information consumers, so that the event will be able to attract the attention of audiences in both broad and narrow areas according to the reach of the media and also the target consumers of the news content that has been published.

This is what causes; any event that has great sensitivity in the community will become a delicious dish for media workers.(Silih Agung Wasesa., 2005) In addition, supported by the rapid development of communication technology, as well as the acceleration of information dissemination, which directly triggers a lot of individual phenomena that in all the duration of their daily lives, cannot be separated from the role of their cyber social interactions. Especially in a country that lives on the basis of democracy like Indonesia. Where people are required to be active and massive in advocating the performance of the governing councils that they have elected to sit on the throne of the state palace. Therefore, the role of the media is the most fundamental instrument for civil society in overseeing every move, performance, and policy that has been or will be decided at the tables of the elected councils.

We understand very well that every information that comes out to the public is the result of the hands of media actors, while we also know that every event will look different if it is packaged from various sides. Because diction, often determines the focus of the problem (Muhammad Ilham et al., 2025), while the background of domination in the hierarchical order of the media often determines the partisanship of the events they pack and throw into the public domain, and this is what makes the audience can only choose which information is felt to be more objective in reporting an event by comparing several reports through several mass media platforms in Indonesia to find out every event that has or is happening in Indonesia. (Achmad Suhendra Hadiwijaya, 2023)

In the current post-reform era, the mass media has become a central actor in shaping public perceptions of political figures. Not only does it function as a conveyor of information, the media also plays an active role in shaping social reality through the construction of narratives and portrayal of figures. This is in line with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) idea in 'The Social Construction of Reality' theory, that social reality is formed through the process of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. In this context, the media is the main externalizing agent that presents political narratives to the public. So it cannot be denied that; through massive and repeated reporting, the media creates a form of image objectivation, which is then internalized by the public as a social truth.(Asyura, 2024)

One of the most visible figures to benefit from this process is Prabowo Subianto. In recent years, Prabowo's image has often been labeled as a controversial former human rights violator during the New Order era, which can be proven through various records and evidence of his

involvement in various forms of human rights violations that occurred in the past, such as: quoted from KOMPAS.com and KONTRAS.org in several reports related to Prabowo Subianto's involvement in the 1997-1998 Activist Abduction case: Prabowo Subianto was allegedly involved in the abduction and enforced disappearance of a number of pro-democracy activists in 1997-1998. This operation was carried out by a special team known as Tim Mawar, which at the time, was under the command of the Special Forces command led by Prabowo Subianto. The team was responsible for the abduction of 23 activists, some of whom remain missing to this day. The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) has conducted a pro-justitia investigation proving Tim Mawar's involvement in gross human rights violations in the past. (Kontras.org, 21/2/2025) In addition, quoted from TEMPO.co regarding dismissal from the military: As a consequence of his alleged involvement in the activist kidnapping case, Prabowo was eventually forced to be discharged from military service in 1998. (tempo.co, 20/3/2024)

Not only that, quoted from Gatra.com and Pojoksatu.id regarding Publications and Documentation of Human Rights Violation Cases: A number of publications have documented Prabowo's involvement in various cases of human rights violations. One of them is a book entitled "Prabowo Subianto's Black Book: The Dark Trail of Reformasi 98", which was launched by Gerak 98 activists. The book reveals various cases, including the abduction of activists, the May 1998 riots, and the alleged coup against President B.J. Habibie (POJOKSATU.id, 10/12/2023), as well as the reactions of victims' families and human rights activists: The families of activists who were victims of abductions and enforced disappearances have consistently demanded justice and revealed Prabowo's involvement in the cases. They voiced concern over the lack of law enforcement against perpetrators of human rights violations and emphasized the importance of remembering this dark history, which is clearly illustrated in the Kamisan Action that continues to be carried out by fellow activists and families of victims of past gross human rights violations. (tempo.co, 16/5/2024)

In addition, at the beginning of Prabowo Subianto's inauguration as President-elect of Indonesia on October 20, 2024, which also triggered several issues that had colored various polemics in Indonesian society at that time, one of the issues considered relevant to this research was the Criticism of Military Involvement in Civilian Government: The policy that allows active military personnel to hold civilian positions in government raises concerns about the return of military dominance in civilian affairs, given the history of human rights violations involving the military in the past, and the urgency of civilian supremacy which is felt to be increasingly threatened. (Detiknews.com, 24/2/2025) This indirectly signals to the public to be actively involved in highlighting the importance of monitoring individuals with controversial track records, such as Prabowo, in positions of power.

This is something that has escaped the attention of the Indonesian people when looking at the figure of President Prabowo Subianto in the 2024 elections. This is because the election of Prabowo Subianto in the 2024 election has directly illustrated how the public's view of Prabowo Subianto has been replaced by a new narrative that makes him a good statesman, a patriotic figure, and a national unifying figure. This narrative does not just appear out of nowhere, but is the result of construction through selective media framing.

Framing theory developed by Entman (1993) explains that the media does not only convey

facts, but also determines how reality is understood through four main strategies: defining the problem, assigning causes, moral judgment, and providing solutions. In the context of Prabowo's news coverage, the mainstream media tends to construct the narrative of human rights violations involving Prabowo Subianto within the framework of national reconciliation and political stability, not within the framework of transitional justice (Nur Halisa Ilyas, 2023). This framing slowly and periodically shapes public perception that the past is a "collective wound" that must be healed symbolically, not legally. As a result, Prabowo never underwent a human rights court process, but his image was restored through collective memory reconciliation mediated by the mass media.

The media's tendency to focus on certain aspects of the narrative and cover up others has influenced people's collective memory of the nation's political history. According to Maurice Halbwachs (1950), collective memory is the result of social construction formed through institutions and social interaction (Monica Hartanti & Christine Claudia Lukman, 2024). When the media systematically obscures traces of human rights violations and constructs new narratives that favor certain figures, society's collective memory is transformed. This process leads to what Paul Ricoeur (2004) calls *strategic forgetting*, the erasure of historical elements that do not fit the narrative of power. (Wiercinski, 2005)

Research on the media's construction of political images is not new. McCombs and Shaw (1972), using agenda-setting theory, explained how the media prioritizes issues for public discussion. Research by (Ariel Heryanto, 2015) highlighted how post-reform Indonesian media contributed to the formation of political identities through nationalist narratives and popular culture. In the context of Prabowo, several studies have explored how his image is reconstructed within the electoral political landscape, as noted by (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2014) "*INDONESIAN POLITICS IN 2014: DEMOCRACY'S CLOSE CALL*", in which they argue that one of the determining factors of Jokowi's victory in the 2014 election was the public's appreciation of democracy, which managed to reduce the efficacy of the authoritarian-populist message delivered in Prabowo's campaign. However, despite this, the future of democracy is still uncertain, given that Prabowo and his supporters now control a large number of seats in the Palace, and moreover these studies are generally still limited to analyzing political communication and campaign strategies.

Meanwhile, studies on collective memory and the politics of memory in Indonesia have also been conducted, such as by Karen Strassler (2010) and Jemma Purdey (2006), which highlight how political violence and the history of past human rights violations tend to be silenced or reduced in the dominant narrative. However, these studies have not specifically examined how mass media actively shape new collective memories that rehabilitate the image of certain figures.

Based on this review, it appears that there are not many studies that explicitly combine three theoretical perspectives; social construction, media framing, and collective memory in analyzing how the mass media erases traces of human rights violations in building a new image of a figure. Moreover, there is no research that deeply dissects this process in the context of Prabowo Subianto, a political actor with a complex and controversial past. This is where the urgency and contribution of this research lies: to reveal how the media not only shapes the image of a figure today, but also rewrites history, and shapes people's collective consciousness about a past that has been "*forgotten*".

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach that aims to understand how the mass media constructs the image of a political figure, in this case Prabowo Subianto, especially regarding his involvement in past human rights violations. This research departs from the belief that the media is not only a channel for delivering information, but also acts as an agent of social construction that is able to shape public perceptions and even influence the direction of society's collective memory.

The method used in this research is critical discourse analysis, with an emphasis on the media framing approach. This analysis not only looks at how information is presented by the media, but also explores the ideological meaning hidden behind the narrative structure of a news story. In other words, this research tries to explore how the mass media construct certain narratives that consciously or unconsciously direct the public to see an issue from a certain perspective, which in this context is how Prabowo's past is retold or even silenced in the contemporary news landscape.

In this study, researchers used literature study as a data collection method, namely through documentation of online media coverage and literature studies that have been available and related to the topic of the problem being studied. The media analyzed were selected from the mainstream media category in Indonesia, such as CNN Indonesia, Kompas, Tempo, Detiknews, and several other mainstream media. The news coverage that was focused on were those that directly or indirectly mentioned Prabowo's involvement in gross human rights violations, both during the New Order period and in the transition phase of Reformasi. The timeframe of the news coverage analyzed is from 2014 to 2024, which reflects an important phase in Prabowo's political career, including his candidacy in the presidential election and his position as Minister of Defense. In addition to media coverage, other supporting data came from reports by independent organizations such as Komnas HAM, KontraS, and various scholarly books and articles that discuss Prabowo, militarism, and human rights violations in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, in the analysis process, the researcher combines three complementary theoretical frameworks, namely: the social construction theory of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the media framing model of Robert Entman, and the collective memory theory of Maurice Halbwachs.

First, social construction theory (Longhofer & Winchester, 2023) is used to examine how the media plays a role in producing narratives about Prabowo. This process is explained through three main stages:

1. Externalization; which is how the media produces a particular narrative that emphasizes Prabowo's nationalist side, while ignoring the controversial aspects of his past
2. Objectification; which is when the narrative begins to be accepted as "truth" after repeated repetition and dissemination
3. Internalization; when the narrative is finally accepted and believed by society as part of social reality, without ever questioning its historical context.

Second, Entman's Framing Analysis is used to examine how the media defines problems, diagnoses causes, makes moral judgments, and suggests remedies (Siregar & Qurniawati, 2022). In this context, the analysis will focus on how the media tends to define human rights violations as part of past history and suggests national reconciliation as a solution, while minimizing the urgency of upholding historical justice.

Third, collective memory theory is used to examine how the media wields power in selecting and shaping social memory about historical events in society (Sayyid Ahmad Husaini, 2023). Through narrative selection, the media can highlight or obscure individual roles in history, including how Prabowo's involvement in the 1998 kidnapping of activists, military operations in East Timor, and the role of the Rose Team gradually lost their significance in public memory. Furthermore, to ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study employed source triangulation techniques by comparing news content from various media outlets, comparing it with official reports and human rights documents, and referencing relevant academic studies. This triangulation is crucial to ensure that researchers do not get trapped in one perspective and maintain objectivity in analyzing the construction of reality built by the media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Media has never been a neutral space (Kodoati & Maida, 2023). It is always bound by power structures, political-economic interests, and ideologies that, consciously or unconsciously, influence how information is produced, disseminated, and received by the public. In this context, the media is not simply a channel for information, but a social actor with the authority to shape social realities in society, including framing the images of public figures and reconstructing historical events.

The phenomenon of image reconstruction involving Prabowo Subianto is a concrete example of how media power operates systematically. On the one hand, this figure has a long and controversial track record, particularly related to his alleged involvement in gross human rights violations during the New Order era (Susanto, 2021). However, on the other hand, mainstream media coverage in recent years has actually shown a tendency to normalize, and even promote, Prabowo's narrative as a symbol of stability, nationalism, and firm military leadership, especially at every democratic party parade held every 5 years in Indonesia, starting from 2014. (Helnanirma Susanti Fau et al., 2025)

This condition does not happen by chance. It is the result of a long process of social construction carried out by the mass media through systematic framing strategies. Unfavorable information, such as human rights violations, Prabowo Subianto's involvement in the Mawar Team, or his role in the political unrest leading up to the Reformasi, was not completely eliminated, but placed in a less strategic position in the news, or presented in a format that weakened the public's critical power towards him. As a result, past narratives that should have become collective considerations in assessing public figures turn into hazy memories that no longer have political urgency in the public mind.

Based on the background of the problem, the discussion in this research will use a combination of three main theoretical approaches: Framing Theory (Entman) to analyze how the media frames the figure of Prabowo in the news, Social Construction Theory (Berger & Luckmann) to understand the process of social reality formation related to his political image in the public mind, and Collective Memory Theory (Halbwachs) to explore how the media contributes to determining what the public remembers and forgets about a figure's history.

Through a descriptive qualitative methodological approach with case studies and content analysis, this research seeks to show that the media has enormous symbolic power in shaping public

perception. It's not just about who the current figures are, but also about who they were in the past, and how the past can be obscured, corrected, or even erased from collective memory.

And with this awareness, it becomes crucial to reexamine the dominant narratives circulating in the public sphere. What we believe to be "reality" today may simply be the result of discursive games and historical constructions that have been modified to serve the interests of those in power over the media.

A. Case Study: Prabowo's Statement and the 2025 Media Stage



Figure 1. President Prabowo Answers Questions from Six National Media Editors-in-Chief

Source: (CNNIndonesia 7 Apr 2025-*Youtube* 2025)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiP96n4z4Lk>

In a special interview broadcast on CNNIndonesia's YouTube channel and widely reported by mainstream media in Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto, currently the 2024 President-elect of Indonesia, expressed his personal views on several crucial issues of the nation, such as the TNI/Polri Bill, student demonstrations, and national stability. In his statement when answering a question from Uni Zulfiani Lubis (Editor-in-Chief of IDN'Times) regarding some of the police handling efforts in tackling some of the recent demonstration movements that often occur in Indonesia, where Prabowo said that demonstrations in Indonesia “must have someone riding on them,” and he also emphasized the importance of national stability and discipline, this indirectly implies that threats to the stability of the country also often come from “outsiders”. Although afterwards, he also stated and tried to explain that demonstrations are also part of Indonesia's democracy, and have also been guaranteed in the 1945 Constitution.

The discourse not only contains political messages, but also has a strong ideological content. Such statements indirectly frame public discontent or civic movements as a nuisance that must be controlled, rather than a manifestation of civil liberties and democracy. The mainstream media, instead of digging deeper into the motives and consistency of the statement with Prabowo's own background, treated the statement as a legitimate state discourse that needs to be respected. This confirms how the media plays an important role in expanding the reach of power discourse through subtle yet massive framing strategies.

For example, Detik.com and Kompas.com emphasized the narrative that Prabowo is a

disciplined and “firm” military figure, and portrayed him as a figure positioned in accordance with Indonesia's current needs. This is evident in the news published by several mainstream media outlets, such as:



Figure 2. The Depiction of a Disciplined and "Firm" Military Figure
Source; (Kompas.com)

In the news published by Kompas.com with the headline “Marching Exercise at Akmil Magelang, Prabowo Looks Most Excited”, it was reported that President Prabowo and his cabinet showed a spirit of discipline in the marching exercise at Akmil Magelang. This illustrates the emphasis on military discipline in leadership. Meanwhile, in the article titled "Prabowo: I Ask TNI-Polri to Be Introspective, Always Self-Correcting" reported that Prabowo asked the TNI and Polri to always be introspective, self-correcting, and orderly and disciplined. This statement emphasizes the importance of discipline in military and police institutions under his current leadership.

In addition, the news published by detiknews with the headline “Prabowo Affirms Not Militaristic to Cabinet during Retreat at Akmil”, stated that President Prabowo Subianto emphasized to the Red and White Cabinet that although the retreat activities at the Military Academy (Akmil) in Magelang imitated a militaristic leadership style, and in the article “Raffi Ahmad Conveys President Prabowo's Message during Retreat at Akmil Magelang”, it was stated that the marching exercises in the retreat aimed to train discipline, cohesiveness, focus, and assertiveness, which are characteristics of military leadership.



Figure 3. The image of discipline that Prabowo has built in his cabinet

Thus, the media seems to give authoritative space to Prabowo's voice to re-narrate himself as a symbol of stability from the militaristic attitude that he is currently forming and projecting under his leadership. In line with that, the figure of nationalism that he also presents as a solution to every problem that is often present on the basis of differences born from the culture of democracy in Indonesia, seems to indicate that indirectly, making critical voices a threat.

This is also exacerbated by the digital and conventional media platforms, which today also often function as a vehicle for the distribution of narratives that in the context of framing theory (Entman), function to frame issues in a way; minimizing the potential for public resistance to the figure's background. Instead of highlighting the contradiction between Prabowo's past and his current commitment to human rights and democracy, the media has become a facilitator that allows the normalization of the dominant narrative.

Through this case study, we can see how the framing process is not random, but highly structured and hegemonic. Prabowo, as a political actor, conveys a narrative (externalization) through the media, which is then reproduced and disseminated by the media (objectivation), until finally the public gradually accepts and believes the narrative as the truth (internalization). This is the starting point for how new social constructions and collective memories are formed, namely when dominant narratives are not only consumed, but also lived by the wider community.

B. Media Constructs Prabowo's Image: Between Past and Present

Prabowo Subianto's image in the Indonesian media has undergone significant transformation over time. In the past, Prabowo was known as a controversial military figure. He was linked to numerous human rights violations, including the kidnapping of activists in 1997-1998 while serving as part of the Kopassus Rose Team, which he led at the time. Various documents and investigations have revealed his structural involvement in repressive state practices, ultimately leading to his dismissal from military service by the Officers' Honorary Council.

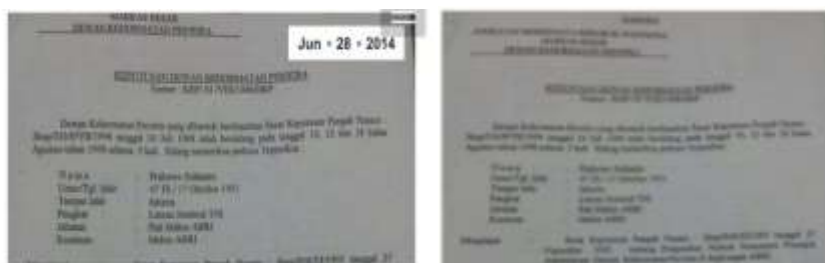


Figure 4. DKP Decree: Dismissal of Prabowo Subianto

Source; (LBH Jakarta, 28 juni 2014)

https://bantuanhukum.or.id/keputusan-dkp-pemecatan-prabowo-subianto-bukan-rahasia/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

However, this past image is slowly being reduced from the mainstream news space. Prabowo's political path to power, which began with two presidential candidacies in 2014 and 2019, as well as serving as Minister of Defense during the reign of President Jokowi, his political opponent in the 2019 general election, to becoming one of the strongest presidential candidates

in 2024. The narrative about him has softened and even shifted. Media coverage has presented Prabowo as a nationalist, assertive and patriotic figure. His past is repackaged or disguised in a frame that emphasizes reconciliation, loyalty to the nation, and political stability. This transformation can be read through three major media strategies in shaping Prabowo's image:

1. Reduction of Past Narratives

In many news reports, Prabowo's involvement in human rights violations is often placed in conditional sentences, or framed as part of a past that has been completed. The media tend to use diction such as "accused," "suspected," or "old issues," and avoid deepening the narrative that puts Prabowo in a position of personal responsibility.

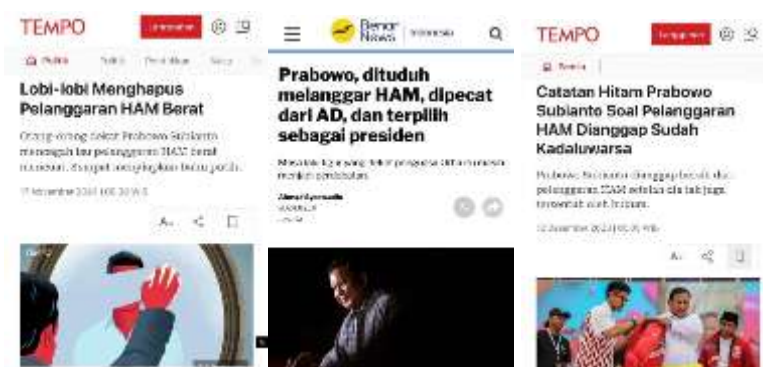


Figure 5. News related to Accusations, Allegations, or Old Issues regarding Prabowo Subianto's Human Rights Violations Source; (Tempo.co dan BenarNews.org)

2. Strengthening the Image of Nationalism and Stability

Prabowo's image was reconstructed with an emphasis on his nationalism: his courage, his military discipline, and his outspoken commitment to national defense. This image was reinforced by selective coverage that emphasized his closeness to the people and his position as a "guardian of sovereignty," particularly after he joined Jokowi's cabinet, emphasizing his commitment to maintaining national stability. This sentiment was evident in Prabowo's statement: "I don't want to be pitted against each other."



Figure 6. News related to Prabowo's image construction, after joining President Jokowi's Cabinet in 2019.

Source; (Tempo.co, DetikNews.com, dan Kompas.com)

3. Elitist and top-down framing of issues

Instead of promoting historical accountability, the media often frames human rights issues in terms of national stability, political elite interests and pseudo-consensus. Reconciliation and amnesty efforts are pushed as solutions, without clarity on transitional justice or victim recognition. This reinforces the illusion that the past can be resolved without having to be thoroughly investigated.

In this context, Framing theory (Entman) can explain how the media constructs narratives in such a way that certain aspects of reality are emphasized, while other aspects are suppressed. The choice of diction, narrative structure, and source of quotation become the main tools in shaping public perception. Meanwhile, from the perspective of Social Construction (Berger & Luckmann), this image transformation shows the process of externalization (the media spreads a new narrative about Prabowo), objectivation (the narrative becomes a reality accepted by the public), and internalization (the public absorbs the narrative as part of a social reality that is considered reasonable and correct). Ultimately, through the lens of Collective Memory (Halbwachs), we can understand how the media plays a role in choosing what is worth remembering and forgetting together. In Prabowo's case, the collective memory of human rights violations is marginalized, while a new, more politically advantageous image is constructed to meet the narrative needs of the current power.

C. Mainstream Media Framing Strategies in Reconstructing Prabowo Subianto's Image

The transformation of Prabowo Subianto's image from a controversial military figure suspected of involvement in gross human rights violations during the New Order era to a statesman touted as a future national leader is inseparable from the important role of mainstream media in framing and distributing narratives about him. The media's framing strategies are dynamic and adaptive to the prevailing political context, particularly since Prabowo began to become intensively active on the national political stage post-Reformasi, particularly since his presidential candidacy in 2014.

1. Framing Human Rights Violations as a "Past That Must Be Forgotten"

Mainstream media tend to frame human rights violations in which Prabowo is alleged to have been involved, such as the 1998 kidnapping of activists, within a limited timeframe, as "past mistakes" irrelevant to the present. This framing occurs in several ways, including:

- Lack of in-depth exploration of the track record of human rights violations; even in interviews or profile reports, this issue is only touched upon superficially or framed as political slander.

- The use of terms of forgiveness and reconciliation, such as "moving on," "it's over," "time to unite," which normalizes forgetting and closes off space for historical justice. This is indirectly supported by the media, which often frames the case in this way.

Furthermore, the 1998 kidnapping of activists is part of a dark past. For example:

- CNN Indonesia (2019); in an article titled "Regarding the Issue of Prabowo's Human Rights Violations, Hashim: It's Been Discussed 10,000 Times, There's No Evidence at All," Kompas positions Prabowo Subianto as a figure who, to date, has never been proven guilty of any past gross human rights violations. This is reinforced by the argument of his younger brother (Hashim Djojohadikusumo) in an interview. Furthermore, in this report, this is also reinforced by their interview with Budiman Sudjatmiko, who stated that Prabowo had admitted to repatriating all the activists kidnapped in 1998. He explained that in 2002, he and one of the repatriated kidnapping victims (Nezar Patria) learned of this through a direct interview with Prabowo. This clearly demonstrates that the media continues to provide space for lengthy defenses of Prabowo Subianto, without any harsh criticism. This shows how the media provides a neutral, even defensive, framing of its past involvement. (KOMPAS.com, 16/11/2023)

2. Re-branding through Nationalist Framing and Assertiveness

Post-2014, the media began to reconstruct Prabowo's image within a more populist and nationalist narrative. He was portrayed as a figure who was firm, authoritative, and pro-national stability. Some media outlets utilized militaristic aesthetics and symbols of nationalism in their coverage of Prabowo's activities. Headlines such as "Prabowo: Indonesia Needs a Firm Leader" or "Prabowo Ready to Defend the Nation" presented a heroic narrative, and coverage often depicted Prabowo in uniform, on horseback, or surrounded by troops. This can be seen in several mainstream media reports, such as:

- AntaraNews (2024) published a story titled "Prabowo: Leaders must prosper the people", which explicitly elevates Prabowo as a symbol of the nation's hope and strength. (AntaraNews.com, 3/12/2023)
- Rmol.id (2024), in the news entitled "Big Hopes for Prabowo Subianto", his image is increasingly strengthened as the ideal figure of the young generation and is described as a figure who is consistent in democracy, this can be proven by; "He has run for President several times in general elections in Indonesia, even though he has failed many times. Now he has been proven to be elected and is ready to be inaugurated as the 8th President of the Republic of Indonesia", and it is clear that he is described without touching on past traces or controversies. (Rmol.id, 17/10/2024)

3. Framing Reconciliation as an Image-Cleansing Tool

Following the 2019 Presidential Election and Jokowi's appointment of Prabowo as Minister of Defense, the media shifted its narrative to a more accommodating one. The post-contest reconciliation process was used as a symbolic moment to "forgive" and "forget" the past. This was evidenced by numerous media outlets emphasizing Prabowo's willingness to "serve the country" and "prioritize national unity," as if to atone for his past. This made the post-2019 Presidential Election "reconciliation" narrative a powerful turning

point in media coverage, as reported by tempo.co and Kompas.com:

- Kompas.com (2019), "House Speaker: Jokowi and Prabowo's Meeting Ends Rivalry Elegantly," in which the media described the meeting as "A message of peace to all elements of the Indonesian people about the urgency of rebuilding unity among the sons and daughters of Mother Earth." The message conveyed by the two statesmen was solely to end societal polarization caused by differing political preferences and foster national unity, without addressing the moral implications of Prabowo's appointment as Minister of Defense. (KOMPAS.com, 15/7/2019)

4. Obscuring Alternative Narratives through Information Selection

Media framing strategies are also evident in what is not reported. Many media outlets ignore or refuse to discuss testimonies from families of kidnapping victims, human rights investigations, or criticism from pro-democracy activists. This absence of alternative narratives creates a collective cognitive bias, making it seem as if there is nothing to question about Prabowo's character. This is evidenced by the almost complete absence of post-2014 investigative coverage reviewing the kidnapping cases, even though victims' families, such as the Indonesian Association of Families of the Missing (IKOHI), Aksi Kamisan, the Commission for Missing Persons and Victims of Violence (KontraS), and several other similar social movements, remain active in demanding justice for every human rights violation that has ever occurred in Indonesia. The absence of information and news publications that should be carried out by mainstream media in Indonesia regarding their advocacy is often seen as an effort and strategy of "silencing" that weakens the public's collective memory. This is also evident in some of the frames frequently used by the media to depict Prabowo Subianto, such as:

1. Frame "National Reconciliation"

Several media outlets, such as *Kompas*, *Liputan 6*, and *Metro TV*, frequently employ a reconciliatory approach when discussing Prabowo's past. This controversial past is framed as "part of history" that must be put behind us for the sake of national unity. By depicting Prabowo's "generosity" in 2019, in which he nevertheless decided to cooperate with President Jokowi, his political opponent in the 2019 election, the media symbolically transformed his image from an antagonist of democracy to a symbol of national stability.



Figure 7. A depiction of Prabowo's magnanimity, nationalism, and unyielding spirit.
Source: (video: Prabowo Subianto's Journey, Deeply Embraced by Military Background | Liputan 6) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJtjMYOLXXc>

2. Frame "A Patriot and Guardian of Sovereignty"

Media outlets like *TVOne* and *TVRI Nasional* actively portray Prabowo in a heroic role: as a firm, authoritative, and fully dedicated Minister of Defense. In this narrative, Prabowo is portrayed as a figure loyal to the nation, working tirelessly to maintain Indonesia's stability and sovereignty. This framing obscures the past by highlighting the nationalistic and performative aspects of the then-government.



Figure 8. A depiction of Prabowo's loyalty to the nation and state
Source: (video: Retired General Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo | THE WARRIOR'S WAY)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFcB2DbjAeg>

3. Frame "Heroism and Personal Change"

Other reports, from mainstream media outlets like *detik.com* or *Tribun Network*, tend to present a narrative that humanizes Prabowo as a changed figure, becoming calmer, wiser, and more willing to listen. Phrases like "no longer explosive," "humble," or "a leader who learns from experience" are used to convey the impression that Prabowo has evolved into the ideal leader of today.



Figure 9. A depiction of Prabowo's character transformation.
Source: (video: Prabowo Subianto's Changes Visible Since Joining Jokowi's Administration)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I.ZPZlhn0zh0>

4. **Frame "Relativization of Human Rights Violations"**

On human rights issues, especially those related to the 1998 abduction of activists and the Mawar Team, many mainstream media have shown a tendency to relativize or reduce the issue. Instead of exploring the facts, news reports tend to avoid inflammatory language. Some news outlets even put the issue in a historical time frame that has "passed," and suggested a settlement without a court mechanism.

5. **Frame "Credibility through Power Alliance"**

After joining Jokowi's cabinet and becoming the presidential candidate of the grand coalition, the media also presented Prabowo as part of a legitimate and credible system. His proximity to national figures and the ruling party, as well as his appearance with the president in various official events, became a kind of "visual legitimacy" reinforced by the media.

From several media depictions through several frames formed to reconstruct Prabowo's image, based on Entman's framing theory, we can identify four main elements that the media has done to Prabowo's image:

- 1) **Problem definition:** Past human rights violations are defined not as crimes to be prosecuted, but as a historical burden to be "forgiven."
- 2) **Causal diagnosis:** The root causes are often obscured or defined as the result of the New Order's systemic and repressive political context, rather than as the responsibility of an individual (Prabowo).
- 3) **Moral judgment:** Prabowo is seen as having changed, become more mature, and worthy of trust. This framing encourages sympathetic moral judgment.
- 4) **Recommended solutions:** Reconciliation, national stability, and support for the government are the primary solutions offered by the media, rather than trials or the revelation of historical truth.

D. Social Construction of Prabowo's Image in Society

In the perspective of social construction theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, social reality does not just exist, but is formed through repeated interactions and involves the process of creating meaning by humans. In this context, the image of Prabowo Subianto as a public figure has been re-constructed by the mass media over time. This process takes place in three main stages: externalization, internalization, and objectivation.

1) **Externalization:** Media Spread New Narratives about Prabowo

Externalization is the initial stage where media actors, as part of the social structure, release certain ideas, values, or narratives into the public sphere through the production of news, opinions, editorials, and political documentaries. In this case, the mass media not only reported the facts related to Prabowo, but also constructed a new narrative about who he is to the public.

The old narrative about Prabowo as an important actor behind human rights violations in the New Order era, including his connection to the 1997-1998 abduction of activists

through the Mawar Team, has begun to be shifted by mainstream media with a more “reconciliatory” narrative. For example, the news began to shift to the discourse of “the past is over”, the importance of “national reconciliation”, or even the portrayal of Prabowo as a ‘changed’ figure, a “true nationalist”, and a “defender of state stability”.

This externalization can be seen in the media's active framing strategies:

- Reducing the intensity of coverage of Prabowo's dark past,
- Promoting a new image, such as his closeness to the people, humorous gestures, and populist style,
- Highlighting Prabowo as a "stable" figure suitable to lead Indonesia amidst global geopolitical tensions.

All of this demonstrates that the media is a key agent in shaping Prabowo's symbolic representation, no longer as a human rights violator, but as a future leader.

2) **Internalisasi:** Society Adopts Media Narratives

Internalization is the process in which the public as an audience absorbs the narrative that has been constructed by the media, and then makes it part of their worldview. As new narratives about Prabowo continue to be repeated through various platforms, ranging from online news, exclusive interviews, to social media, people slowly and periodically adopt these narratives into their collective consciousness, which can be seen clearly from the electability surveys that continue to rise, even though the issue of human rights violations is still attached to him. In fact, in various public discussions or public opinions, many voices began to state that “Prabowo has changed”, “it's just a past mistake”, or “what matters now is that he is a nationalist”.

The media has a role as an opinion-disciplining actor, where they not only offer information, but also frame moral values and public attitudes towards public figures. In this case, the public is not only treated to information, but also directed to interpret and assess the image of a specific figure.

3) **Objektivasi:** New Narratives Accepted as Collective Truth

Objectivation is the final stage of social construction, where a narrative that was initially merely media discourse becomes a social reality considered "normal," "ordinary," or even "true" by the wider public. Prabowo's new image as a stable, nationalist, and patriotic leader is no longer considered a construct, but rather a natural and objective truth. At this stage, alternative narratives, such as criticism of his involvement in human rights violations, begin to be marginalized and deemed outdated or irrelevant. In fact, many young people lack adequate historical knowledge about Prabowo during the New Order era, a fact clearly evident in his minimal representation in dominant media narratives.

Objectivation explains how the media not only shapes momentary opinions but also constructs the nation's collective memory, determining who deserves to be remembered as heroes and who is erased from history.

E. Collective Memory of Prabowo: Between Past Violations and Rebranding Power

In the context of contemporary Indonesian politics, the image of a public figure is not only shaped by actual actions in the present, but also by how people's collective memory is shaped and directed through the media. Maurice Halbwachs mentioned that collective memory is a social construction of memory that is arranged in shared discursive spaces, such as media, education, state symbols, and political elite narratives. (Lestari & Parihala, 2020) In the case of Prabowo Subianto, the process of obscuring and selecting past memories becomes a crucial point in understanding how the public accepts and even legitimizes his presence as a state leader.

The media plays a dominant role in curating pieces of history that are considered important to remember, while determining which parts are forgotten or reduced. Since running for election in 2014, and even more so after joining President Jokowi's administration post-Presidential Election 2019, narratives about Prabowo's past, especially regarding his involvement in the Mawar Team, the 1998 abduction of activists, as well as other alleged human rights violations, have rarely appeared critically in the mainstream media. Instead, a re-framing pattern has emerged that positions Prabowo as a nationalist, patriotic figure, and even as a knight who is ready to embrace political opponents for the sake of state stability.

For example, in various news reports, the media often portrays Prabowo as a "changed" figure, emphasizing narratives of national reconciliation, political maturity, and his strategic role in the defense sector. Even when the topic of the past arises, many media outlets tend to embed narratives such as "it's in the past," "it hasn't been legally proven," or "it's time to move on for the sake of national unity." This shows that the media not only represents reality but also actively shapes society's collective memory. Collective memory about Prabowo, in this case, has undergone significant historical revision. This process occurred in three stages:

1. Selective Narrative Distribution

The media consistently propagates narratives that minimize or neutralize Prabowo's past, replacing it with positive representations of the present. Phrases like "Prabowo, from rival to defender of the nation" or "Prabowo is a statesman who wants to create peace for the nation" reinforce this narrative.

2. Symbolic Repetition and Reinforcement

Through symbols such as military visits, flag-raising, or nationalist speeches broadcast by the media, Prabowo's image is re-ingrained within the framework of nationalism. This repetition instills new memories that replace his previous involvement in human rights violations.

3. Social legitimacy through Public Consensus

Gradually, memories of Prabowo's involvement in human rights violations ceased to be a major issue in the public sphere. In fact, the younger generation growing up post-Reformasi recognized him more as the Minister of Defense or a presidential candidate, rather than as a central figure in the dynamics of 1998. This consensus was born and formed from an accumulation of memories curated by the media and political elite.

Thus, collective memory is not something neutral or organic, but the result of the construction and struggle for meaning in the public sphere. In this context, media and state

power play a role in defining who deserves to be remembered, who deserves to be forgotten, and who is given the power over space to rewrite their own history. This not only affects perceptions of Prabowo, but also how the nation addresses historical justice and the collective wounds of the past. If the dominant narrative continues to whitewash the past, then the question that should be asked is: Do we still have the space to remember and demand the full truth?

F. Media and Power over Memory: When History Becomes a Narrative Commodity

In the dynamics of power contestation, the media has transformed into more than just a communication tool, it has become an architect of narrative, determining the boundary between what is remembered and what is forgotten. When the media repeats an event with a certain narrative, they are not only conveying information, but instilling a certain way of understanding the reality of the event. It is not surprising, then, that the media is also able to reconstruct history: changing the image of figures, selecting collective memory, and creating alternative histories that are more in line with the interests of current power.

This process is evident in the case studies presented in this research, and it can be seen that the media plays two functions at once:

- 1) Systematically forgetting parts of history that interfere with the image that is being built, and
- 2) Creating new memories through the repetition of narratives that better suit contemporary political needs.

In this context, history is not a fixed entity, but a space open to interpretation, recontextualization, or even erasure. When access to information production is controlled by institutions with political interests, history can become a tool of power. Social construction theory shows that social reality, including history, is formed through a process of externalization, internalization, and objectivation. The media is a key actor in this process. They disseminate meaning, determine what is worthy of memory, and ultimately make these narratives accepted as truth. This is where history becomes vulnerable to manipulation, and in this regard, both consciously and unconsciously, the media becomes a key actor in the project of reconstructing the nation's collective memory. Therefore, what we are facing is not simply the reshaping of a figure's image, but also a struggle over historical narratives that determines who will be remembered as "heroes" and who will be forgotten as "perpetrators."

CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical description, the socio-political context, and the spotlight on the dynamics of media representation in shaping the image of public figures, this proposal emphasizes the urgency of studying the role of mass media as the main agent in reshaping the nation's collective memory. By focusing on the figure of Prabowo Subianto, who has a controversial track record related to past human rights violations but is now the president-elect, this research raises important issues about how the media can function not only as a conveyor of information, but also as an

instrument of power in reconstructing history and manipulating public perception.

Within this framework, this proposal offers a multidisciplinary approach through the theories of Framing (Entman), Social Construction (Berger & Luckmann), and Collective Memory (Halbwachs & Ricoeur), to explore how the media systematically directs public meaning towards the past, present, and future of politicized figures. This research not only records how political images are shaped, but also raises the issue of collective ethics: the extent to which society can distinguish between constructed narratives and historical facts.

Thus, this journal also emphasizes that history is not always neutral. It can be reconstructed, polished, and even erased from public consciousness if the media sides with the interests of the rulers. As a closing note, we need to realize that if society is not critical enough and active enough to maintain collective memory, then future narratives will continue to be determined by a handful of elites, and not by the truth itself.

REFERENCES

- Achmad Suhendra Hadiwijaya. (2023). SINTESA TEORI KONSTRUKSI SOSIAL REALITAS DAN KONSTRUKSI SOSIAL MEDIA MASSA. *DIALEKTIKA KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi Dan Pembangunan Daerah*, 11(1), 75–89. [Vol. 11 No. 1 \(2023\): DIALEKTIKA KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi dan Pembangunan Daerah](#)
- Adhyasta Dirgantara, & Novianti Setuningsih. (2023). *Soal Isu Pelanggaran HAM Prabowo, Hashim: Sudah 10.000 Kali Dibahas, Tak Ada Bukti Sama Sekali*. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/11/16/05360371/soal-isu-pelanggaran-ham-prabowo-hashim-sudah-10000-kali-dibahas-tak-ada>
- Ariel Heryanto. (2015). *Identitas Dan Kenikmatan*. Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2015.
- Artika Rachmi Farmita. (2024). *Sebagian Benar, Klaim tentang Pemecatan terhadap Prabowo pada 1998*. <https://www.tempo.co/cekfakta/sebagian-benar-klaim-tentang-pemecatan-terhadap-prabowo-pada-1998-349032>
- Aspinall, E., & Mietzner, M. (2014). Indonesian Politics in 2014: Democracy's Close Call. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 50(3), 347–369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2014.980375>
- Asyura, A. sutasya D. (2024). *Konstruksi Perilaku Homoseksual Mahasiswa di Kota Makassar= Construction Of Homosexual Student Behavior in Makassar*. Universitas Hasanuddin.
- Dimas Bagus Arya Saputra. (2025). “Siaran Pers #PenjabatHAMJadiPejabat: Awas! Ex-Tim Mawar Berkonsolidasi di Tampuk Kekuasaan.” <https://kontras.org/artikel/siaran-pers-penjahathamjadipejabat-awas-ex-tim-mawar-berkonsolidasi-di-tampuk-kekuasaan>
- Fauzan. (2023). “Prabowo: Pemimpin harus sejahteraan rakyat” . <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/3852543/prabowo-pemimpin-harus-sejahteraan-rakyat>
- Firdausi. (2023). *Aktivist 98 Ini Luncurkan Buku Hitam Prabowo Subianto, Kekejamannya Detail Diulas*. <https://www.pojoksatu.id/nasional/1083457366/aktivis-98-ini-luncurkan-buku-hitam-prabowo-subianto-kekejamannya-detail-diulas>
- Haryanti Puspita Sari, & Bayu Galih. (2019). *Ketua DPR: Pertemuan Jokowi dan Prabowo Akhiri Rivalitas dengan Elegan* . <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/07/15/09151911/ketua-dpr-pertemuan-jokowi-dan-prabowo-akhiri-rivalitas-dengan-elegan>
- Helnanirma Susanti Fau, Askarman Laia, Lies Dian Marsa Ndraha, & Baspuri Luahambowo. (2025). Strategi Retorika dalam Pidato Calon Presiden Prabowo: Analisis Wacana pada Pemilu 2024. *Jurnal Kusa Lawa* , 4(2), 127–141. <https://kusalawa.ub.ac.id/index.php/kusalawa/issue/view/8>
- Izza, D. N. F. (2023). Peran Media Pers Dalam Pembentukan Opini Publik Dimasa Demokrasi Liberal Dan Terpimpin. *Pubmedia Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.47134/pssh.v1i3.137>
- Kodoati, M. C., & Maida, S. T. (2023). DEFISIT KRITIS MEDIA MASSA: MENIMBANG

- KEBUTUHAN AKAN REGULASI DIRI MEDIA MASSA BERDASARKAN PEMIKIRAN JÜRGEN HABERMAS. *DIALEKTIKA KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi Dan Pembangunan Daerah*, 11(1), 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.33592/dk.v11i1.3534>
- Longhofer, W., & Winchester, D. (2023). *Social Theory Re-Wired: New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003320609>
- Marsha Odelia. (2025). *Dinamika Kembalinya Peran Militer dalam Urusan Sipil*. <https://news.detik.com/kolom/d-7793086/dinamika-kembalinya-peran-militer-dalam-urusan-sipil>
- Mochammad Fauzan Amin, Muhammad Ramdhani, & Oky Oxygentri. (2022). “Analisis Framing Pemberitaan Aksi Teror Mabes Polri pada Media Online Kumparan dan Tirto. id.” *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi; Journal.Unpas.Ac.Id*, 5(2), 221–230. <https://doi.org/10.23969/linimasa.v5i2.5229>
- Monica Hartanti, & Christine Claudia Lukman. (2024). *Memori Heroik dalam Selebar Batik* (T. Meldi Kesuma, Ed.). Syiah Kuala University Press.
- Muhammad Ilham, Triday Repelita, Andrean Kurniawan, & Rofiqoh Nafisatustsani. (2025). Analisis Bentuk Dan Pilihan Kata (Diksi) Dalam Penulisan Bahasa Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, 11(2), 176–181. <http://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/JIWP/issue/view/135>
- Ni Made Sukmasari. (2024). *Bara Reformasi Terus Dihadupkan: Aksi Kamisan Demi Keadilan Mereka Korban Penculikan*. <https://www.tempo.co/politik/bara-reformasi-terus-dihidupkan-aksi-kamisan-demi-keadilan-mereka-korban-penculikan-58521>
- NUR HALISA ILYAS. (2023). *ANALISIS FRAMING BERITA KEKERASAN TERHADAP JURNALIS TEMPO “NURHADI” DI MEDIA ONLINE TEMPO.CO*. INSTITUT AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI PAREPRE. <https://repository.iainpare.ac.id/id/eprint/6700/>
- Sayyid Ahmad Husaini. (2023). *Memori Kolektif Masyarakat Terhadap Bencana Situ Gantung Tahun 2009*. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah. <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/78758>
- Silih Agung Wasesa. (2005). *Strategi public relation*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Siregar, A. K., & Qurniawati, E. F. (2022). Analisis Framing Pemberitaan Buzzer di tempo.co. *Journal of New Media and Communication*, 1(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.55985/jnmc.v1i1.1>
- Susanto, E. (2021). INDEPENDENSI MEDIA TEMPO DAN PENGARUH EKONOMI POLITIK DALAM PRAKTIK STRUKTURASI. *Jurnal Pustaka Komunikasi*, 4(1), 24–38. <https://doi.org/10.32509/pustakom.v4i1.1314>
- Tobaristani. (2024). “Harapan Besar kepada Prabowo Subianto”. <https://rmol.id/publika/read/2024/10/17/641150/harapan-besar-kepada-prabowo-subianto>
- Wiercinski, A. (2005). Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 15(2), 105–111. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.2005.247>