

Representation as Solution: Symbolic Governance and the Visual Politics of Contemporary Indonesian Banknotes

Harry Isra Muhammad, Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia

Silviana Purwanti, Universitas Mulawarman, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article critically examines the recent changes to Indonesian banknotes, particularly the inclusion of a national hero from West Papua for the first time in history. By employing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) and conjunctural analysis from the cultural studies tradition, this study investigates how the representation of West Papua on banknotes functions within the visual politics of inclusion and exclusion. This symbolic practice takes place amid ongoing protests and unrest in Papua, representing a broader conjuncture in which the Indonesian state seeks to manage and contain dissent through visual and textual representation. The findings reveal that while the inclusion of a West Papuan figure in Indonesian banknotes is framed as an act of national recognition, it simultaneously operates as a discursive mechanism to reinforce state hegemony. The study also highlights how this symbolic inclusion aligns with other state-driven visual and textual strategies that prioritize national unity while marginalizing demands for material justice, especially during the Papuans protest against racism in 2019 with which the Papuans' symbol and culture were appropriated in the cultural events held by the Indonesian state. In other words, the practice of representation is seen as favouring symbolic solution over addressing material inequalities — an episteme that frames the West Papuan identity within the state's hegemonic discourse.

Keywords: banknotes, representation, visual politics, foucauldian discourse analysis

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Introduction

Banknotes serve as mundane yet powerful tools of statecraft, embedding political narratives into the everyday practices of economic exchange. Nevertheless its significance extends beyond its economic function, it also operates as cultural artefact that carry the weight of national identity, historical memory, and political ideology in a banal sense (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Helleiner, 2003; Unwin & Hewitt, 2001). In Indonesia, a nation characterized by its vast diversity and historical complexities, banknotes emerge as a particularly potent medium for the articulation of state's political currency (Strassler, 2020).

The mundane nature of banknotes often belies their significance as instruments of power. As Foucault (1972) argued, objects and practices embedded in everyday life frequently serve as conduits for the dissemination and normalization of dominant power. Banknotes are no exception. Their design, circulation, and usage operate as mechanisms through which the state exercises soft power, subtly shaping perceptions of national identity and belonging. In this context, the visual and textual elements inscribed on banknotes are not arbitrary but deliberate choices that represent the state's priorities and ideological orientations.

This study examines the latest major changes in Indonesian banknotes that took place in 2016. Specifically, it analyses the inclusion of a West Papuan national hero in the national banknotes for the first time in history, framing this practice as part of a broader strategy of what we call as "symbolic governance." The strategic redesign of Indonesian banknotes, particularly the incorporation of Frans Kaisiepo—a national hero from West Papua—raises critical questions about the politics of representation and the state's engagement with its marginalized regions. This move occurs within the broader context of Indonesia's efforts to consolidate its national identity while navigating its contentious relationship with West Papua, a region marked by historical exploitation, militarization, and persistent demands for independence (Kadir, 2024; Karma, 2014).

To understand the relationship the banknotes with the state's politics of representation, we use Foucault (1972, 1981) to enable us to examine the its broader semiotic context and its discursive formation that share the similar strategy and episteme when dealing with socio-political issues in and about West Papua. We specifically ask, how does the representation of Frans Kaisiepo on Indonesian banknotes represent the state's approach to managing its relationship with West Papua? And how does this approach share similar episteme with other state discourse about West Papua?

Literature Review

Researching Banknotes

Scholars have extensively examined the multifaceted roles of banknotes, exploring their designs, symbolic functions, and socio-political implications. This body of research collectively underscores the complex ways in which currencies mediate identity, power, and resistance. The representation of gender in banknotes, for instance, highlights the interplay between cultural norms and monetary design. In a more recent study, Hadylaya (2023) noted the representation of women in Indonesian banknotes.

However, these advancements often remain superficial, reflecting persistent struggles for gender equality within broader societal structures. This theme of inclusion and exclusion in

banknote representation extends beyond gender to encompass other aspects of identity and power. The role of banknotes as mediums of political resistance provides a compelling counterpoint to their official narratives. Strassler (2020) explored how activists in Indonesia repurposed currency during the New Order regime to critique authoritarian governance. By altering the imagery and inscriptions on banknotes, they transformed these objects into tools of protest, crystallizing dissent into visible and tangible forms of public discourse. This remediation of money demonstrates its potential as a site of ideological contestation, challenging the state's monopoly over its symbolic meanings.

At the same time, the question of who controls the design of banknotes reveals the contested nature of monetary representation. Penrose (2011), in her study of Scotland's banknotes, challenged the assumption that national governments hold absolute authority over currency design. Instead, she highlighted the significant roles played by non-state actors, such as private institutions and artists, in shaping the iconography of banknotes. This decentralization complicates traditional notions of sovereignty, illustrating how monetary design emerges from collaborative and contested processes. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within these processes often reflect broader political and social tensions.

The aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of banknotes further deepen their significance as cultural artifacts. Elbardawil (2020) examined the visual lexicon and cultural aesthetics of banknote design, emphasizing their role in expressing national identity and collective memory. By incorporating stylistic elements that resonate with the public's cultural sensibilities, banknotes evoke pride and unity while reinforcing state narratives. Cabrera Arús (2020) extended this analysis by focusing on the politics of representation, arguing that the selection of specific symbols and figures on paper money serves to mediate state-society relations. Through these choices, governments construct narratives that legitimize their authority while often excluding marginalized communities and counter-narratives.

The geopolitical implications of banknote design are particularly evident in the work of First & Sheffi (2015), who studied Israeli banknotes. Their research revealed how the imagery of selected sites and landscapes on currency reinforced Jewish-Israeli sovereignty while marginalizing Palestinian narratives. This deliberate emphasis on Zionist symbols and the exclusion of contested geographies underscores the role of banknotes in asserting territorial claims and solidifying national identity. Similar to Strassler (2020) findings in Indonesia, this case demonstrates how monetary representation can entrench state ideologies while simultaneously becoming a focal point for resistance.

Collectively, these studies illuminate the intricate connections between banknotes, identity, and power. From gender representation (Hadylyaya, 2023) to political resistance (Strassler, 2020), the processes of monetary design and representation reflect broader societal dynamics. The involvement of non-state actors (Penrose, 2011) and the aesthetic strategies employed by governments (Cabrera Arús, 2020; Elbardawil, 2020) further complicate the narratives encoded in currency. Additionally, the geopolitical stakes of banknote design, as highlighted by First & Sheffi (2015), underscore the currency's role as both a tool of governance and a site of ideological contestation.

Representation as Symbolic Governance

Foucault (1972) concept of discourse offers a powerful framework for understanding how power operates through the micro-physicalities of everyday objects such as banknotes. For

Foucault, discourse does not simply mirror reality; rather, it is an assemblage of statements that actively produce and organize knowledge (Foucault, 1980; Mills, 2003). In this regard, discourse provides the strategies and systems through which knowledge about a particular topic is represented and understood at specific historical junctures (Foucault, 1981). This process involves more than just linguistic designations; discourse functions as a practice that systematically shapes and defines the objects it references:

Discourses [are no longer seen] as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents of representation) but as practices that systematically form the object of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to language (langue) and to speech (parole). (Cousins & Hussain, 1984, p. 240)

By positioning discourse as both language and practice, Foucault distinguishes between what is said (language) and what is done (practice). This distinction highlights the regulatory frameworks that govern discourse, determining what can and cannot be articulated within specific contexts (Mills, 2003). The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion inherent in discourse play a central role in producing truths and delegitimizing competing narratives. This dynamic imbues certain discourses with authority, enabling them to define what is factual or valid while silencing alternative perspectives, as Foucault (1981) stated:

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of producers whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality. (p. 53)

For Foucault, power is not centralized in the state apparatus, as theorized by Marxist scholars like Althusser (1971). Instead, it is dispersed and circulates within societal relationships. Power functions through what Foucault describes as capillary mechanisms, operating at the extremities of social structures to create disciplinary and normalizing effects (Foucault, 1980). This decentralized conception of power shifts the focus to how governance is enacted through everyday practices, objects, and interactions. This approach resonates with Agamben (2009) conceptualization of the apparatus (*dispositif*), which he defines as a network of practices, institutions, and technologies that regulate human behavior and mediate relationships between individuals and power structures.

Agamben (2009) expands on Foucault's notion of the apparatus by emphasizing its role in capturing and managing life itself. For him, the apparatus encompasses a broad array of mechanisms—from legal systems to mundane objects like banknotes—that organize and govern human conduct. Banknotes, as an apparatus, not only facilitate economic transactions but also function as tools of governance that inscribe state authority, mediate identities, and regulate social relations. This dual role of banknotes aligns with Stuart Hall's theorization of representation as a site where meanings are produced, contested, and stabilized (Hall, 1997). Hall (1997) extends Foucault's insights by emphasizing that representation is not merely about reflecting reality but is actively involved in constructing meaning and identity. Representation, in this sense, operates as a form of governance by mediating power relations and shaping how individuals perceive and relate to the state (Hall, 1997).

The integration of Foucault's discourse, Agamben's apparatus, and Hall's representation provides a robust framework for theorizing representation as governance. Banknotes serve as

a concrete example of how these concepts converge, operating simultaneously as discursive artifacts, apparatuses of power, and mediums of representation. Through their design and circulation, banknotes produce knowledge, regulate behavior, and stabilize power relations. Hall's concept of conjunctural analysis further enriches this understanding by situating representation within specific historical and cultural contexts. Hall argues that discourses do not exist in isolation; they are shaped by material, economic, and structural conditions (Hall, 2018). In periods of crisis, the state employs representation to secure consent and stabilize its position. This aligns with Foucault (1972) observation that discourse is both a modality of power and a site of struggle, where dominant narratives are contested by subaltern voices. Agamben (2009) idea of the apparatus complements this by highlighting how these mechanisms operate not only at the ideological level but also through the material and institutional practices that govern everyday life.

By synthesizing these insights, representation can be theorized as a form of governance that operates through the interplay of language, practice, and material conditions. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how state narratives are constructed, maintained, and contested within specific socio-political contexts. As Hall (2018) noted, the effort to win consent is an incessant and persistent process, particularly in moments of crisis. Representation, as both discourse and governance, emerges as a critical strategy in this ongoing struggle for power and legitimacy, mediated through apparatuses that shape both perception and conduct.

The governance enacted through representation involves both symbolic and material dimensions. Symbolically, representation constructs inclusive national identities and affirms state legitimacy. Materially, it regulates behavior and reinforces power hierarchies through apparatuses like banknotes, which mediate interactions between the state and its citizens. The representation of Frans Kaisiepo functions symbolically to project an image of unity while materially reinforcing state narratives that marginalize Papuan resistance movements. This interplay of discourse, apparatus, and representation underscores the complex dynamics of governance in contemporary societies.

Results

Current Changes in Indonesian Banknotes

In September 2016, President Joko Widodo issued a decree mandating the redesign of Indonesian banknotes and coins, based on a law enacted in 2011 requiring the inclusion of national heroes on currency. This legislation grants the president the authority to select the individuals to be represented. Following this mandate, Joko Widodo submitted a list of 12 national heroes to the Central Bank of Indonesia for inclusion in the new currency series, produced by PERURI (Public Enterprise for Banknotes Printing and Minting of the Republic of Indonesia). Of the 12 figures chosen, 10 were new to the currency; seven appeared on banknotes and five on coins.

Figure 1

Current Series of Indonesian Banknotes (Katalog Uang Kertas Indonesia: 1782-2018, 2018)



A notable feature of this redesign was the deliberate effort to reflect Indonesia's geographic and ethnic diversity. For the first time, the national heroes represented regions spanning the entire archipelago. Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta—the founding fathers of Indonesia—continued to appear on the IDR 100,000 banknotes, symbolizing Central-East Java and West-South Sumatra, respectively. Sulawesi and Kalimantan were represented by local heroes on the IDR 20,000 and IDR 5,000 notes, while heroes from Aceh and Nusa Tenggara appeared on the IDR 1,000 and IDR 100 notes. This marked a departure from previous series, where the majority of heroes originated from Java and Sumatra.

Another unprecedented feature was the inclusion of Frans Kaisiepo, a West Papuan national hero, on the IDR 10,000 note. Historically, West Papua had limited representation in Indonesian currency. During Dutch colonization in 1951, the region's banknotes depicted Queen Juliana in the Dutch Nieuw Guinea series. Following Indonesia's annexation of West Papua in 1963, Soekarno's image replaced these colonial designs (Kusuma, 2021). Thus, the incorporation of Frans Kaisiepo in 2016 represented a significant symbolic gesture.

Figure 2

Frans Kaisiepo at the Front Page (Above) in Idr 10,000 of an Indonesia Banknotes



Frans Kaisiepo's political legacy is both celebrated and contested. A staunch advocate for the integration of West Papua into Indonesia, Kaisiepo founded the Irian Political Party in 1961 to campaign for this cause. He played a pivotal role in supporting TRIKORA, a military operation aimed at reclaiming West Papua from Dutch control, and later served as the region's governor. During his tenure, Kaisiepo actively lobbied local councils to vote for integration in the controversial Act of Free Choice in 1969, an election marred by allegations of coercion and military intimidation (Sitompul, 2024). Despite his contributions to Indonesian statehood, Kaisiepo's legacy remains divisive among Papuans, many of whom regard him as a figure of assimilation rather than independence.

The redesign also introduced the phrase "Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia" (The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) on the front of all banknotes, prominently positioned beside the images of the national heroes. This slogan, derived from the 2011 law, has been historically associated with the defense of Indonesia's territorial integrity. It gained prominence during the annexation of Timor Leste in the 1970s, often accompanied by the assertion that Indonesia's territorial boundaries were "undisputed." Following Timor Leste's independence in 1999, the Indonesian government replaced its banknotes with new designs, underscoring the symbolic power of currency in delineating national boundaries and asserting sovereignty.

The Conjunction of Indonesian Banknotes: Indonesia-West Papua Bitter Relationship

West Papua and Indonesia have long been embroiled in a complex and contentious relationship. From the perspective of Papuans, the Indonesian military occupation after Dutch colonization in 1963 is viewed as a continuation of colonialism under a different guise (Karma, 2014). Conversely, many Indonesians perceive this relationship as a legitimate effort to integrate West Papua into Indonesia. Nevertheless, there exist factions within both

populations: Indonesians who advocate for West Papuan independence and Papuans who support integration. Central to the conflict is the extensive exploitation of Papuan lands by national and multinational corporations, facilitated by the Indonesian state (Kadir, 2024). Consequently, Papuans formed the Free West Papua Movement, which the Indonesian government labels as separatist. President Joko Widodo has articulated a vision of transforming West Papua into a Silicon Valley in Eastern Indonesia. To further this ambition, he appointed a young Papuan entrepreneur as a specialized staff member, recognizing both his successful rise from poverty and his initiative in establishing entrepreneurial programs that simultaneously promote integrationist ideology among Papuan youth (Ihsanuddin & Meiliana, 2019). Through this appointment, the president anticipates innovative contributions toward regional development.

The Indonesian government imposes strict limitations on freedom of expression in West Papua. Military actions frequently disrupt mass gatherings, and journalists face significant restrictions when attempting to report from the region (Zakaria & Dwicahyo, 2022). Advocates for Papuan independence, whether native or Indonesian supporters, often face severe repercussions, including arrest, torture, imprisonment, and extrajudicial killings, accompanied by nationalist rhetoric emphasizing Indonesia's unquestioned territorial sovereignty. Notably, the redesign of Indonesian banknotes coincided with the mass incarceration of over 1700 Papuan activists who participated in demonstrations during May Day in 2016 (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia, 2016).

Notably, a significant incident occurred in 2019, where Papuans were subjected to racial abuse by Indonesian military personnel in Surabaya, East Java, being derogatively referred to as monkeys, pigs, and dogs (Lamb, 2019). This incident stemmed from suspicions that Papuan students had desecrated the Indonesian national flag in front of their dormitory. The event triggered immediate reactions from West Papuans, the Indonesian government, and Indonesian citizens. In West Papua, massive demonstrations erupted, with protestors explicitly demanding independence from Indonesia. Conversely, the Indonesian government responded by shutting down internet access and deploying additional military troops to the region. Moreover, the Regent of Blitar in East Java recommended that civil servants—teachers, local government staff—as well as students, wear symbols demonstrating their solidarity with Papuans (Pemerintah Kabupaten Blitar, 2020).

Figure 3

The Regent of Blitar, East Java, Wearing a Papua's Traditional Hat in an Event Called "Blitar Loves Papua"



Figure 4

An Event Called “Blitar Loves Papua,” Responding to the West Papuans Protest in 2020



In a similar fashion, during a car-free day event in the capital city, Jakarta, the Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs performed a traditional West Papuan song. Significantly, this event also included traditional West Papuan dances, with participants wearing T-shirts bearing the slogan “Papua is Indonesia” (Minggu, 2019). Concurrently, the Police General of Indonesia engaged in a comparable symbolic gesture during an event celebrating the anniversary of Indonesian policewomen. From these events, it is evident that an unequal power dynamic exists between the Indonesian government, which seeks to defend its territorial integrity, and the Papuan population, which continues to advocate for independence.

Discussion

Representation as Solution, Indonesian Banknotes and Its Discursive Formation

A closer examination of Indonesian banknotes reveals how unequal power relations produce and reinforce knowledge about West Papua as perceived truths. The representation of heroes from various Indonesian islands on the banknotes constructs an image of “unity in diversity.” This representation generates two significant impressions: the government's advocacy of multiculturalism and the inseparable status of West Papua within Indonesian territory, irrespective of Papuan struggles for independence. The juxtaposition of the phrase “The Unitary State of Indonesia” with a West Papuan national hero significantly confines Papuans within an Indonesian ideological framework. If banknotes are conceptualized as “territorial currency,” marking the emergence and domestication of nation-states, the depiction of national heroes from diverse Indonesian islands can be interpreted as a strategic effort by the state and media to disseminate Indonesian geopolitical awareness, fostering a sense of belonging among ethnically and geographically diverse populations. Thus, the state functions not merely to ensure the legality of currency circulation but also to protect national unity and territorial integrity through symbolic representation.

This notion of belonging aligns with Rousseau (1991) concept of money as the “real bond of society,” invented as a standard measurement facilitating equal exchanges within society. Consequently, incorporating a West Papuan national hero into Indonesian banknotes serves

not only to reinforce West Papuan identity as inherently Indonesian but also to solidify social cohesion. Additionally, this can be related to Foucault (1980) concept of visibility. John Rajchman (1988), posited that visibility equates to discipline, whereby becoming a spectacle means becoming surveilled. Following this perspective, the circulation and distribution of currency are continuously monitored by the Indonesian Central Bank. Thus, when the Head of the Indonesian Central Bank for Papua/West Papua stated that the IDR 10,000 denomination was the most favoured banknote among Papuans, it suggested a measurement of psychological proximity between Papuans and Indonesia.

In order for the discourse of the unity of Indonesia to establish its truth, as Foucault argued, it is necessary to exclude other equally valid discourse. Conversely, in order for discourse to not to be excluded, it has to be subjected with another powerful discourse within the apparatus. Apparatus, once again, as Agamben (2009) argued before, always involves a process of subjectification, they have to produce their subject. This is the logic that precisely working in the case of Indonesian banknotes. Although Frans Kaisiepo was from West Papua, he supported West Papua to integrate with Indonesia rather than becoming independent. He was more of the hero for Indonesia rather than for West Papua. Thus, the incorporation of Frans Kaisiepo in Indonesian banknotes might be regarded as an appreciation for West Papuans who are pro-integration. Whereas, for West Papuans who want to be independent, this might be seen as a conditional cooptation. This is undoubtedly the same logic of the endorsement of the dominant culture that sustains social stability in which its significance is determined by whether it perpetuates dominant cultural values or not (McRobbie, 2005). We could also say, West Papuans is only of significance or appreciated as long as they are subjected within the discourse of NKRI or “The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.” Both Frans Kaisiepo and a young entrepreneur from West Papua I mentioned above, who are recruited by the President as one of his specialised staffs are exemplary of this appropriation.

The strategy of co-opting West Papuans into the realm of “The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia” is multifaceted, evident in various discourses sharing common regularities with Kaisiepo's representation in banknotes. Besides co-opting West Papuan figures who align with NKRI discourse, other representational strategies involve appropriating West Papuan symbols to perpetuate this discourse. West Papuan language was appropriated to delegitimize the Free West Papua Movement, and traditional Papuan hats were appropriated) to symbolize Papuan inclusion within Indonesia. Similar appropriations occurred with traditional West Papuan songs performed by the Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs and the Police General, as previously described.

This discursive formation must be contextualized within material, economic, and structural factors—elements Foucault (1993) overlooked in his theory of discourse and power/knowledge—to understand fully what enables this formation. As previously noted, the Indonesian state severely represses freedom of expression in West Papua, preventing mass gatherings and restricting journalists' access. Additionally, intensified punitive measures target both Papuan and Indonesian independence advocates. These policies align with efforts to transform West Papua into a Silicon Valley in Eastern Indonesia, removing potential obstacles to investment. Consequently, the unequal power dynamic between pro-integration Indonesians and independence-seeking Papuans not only suppresses alternative discourses but also fosters new behaviors reinforcing pro-integration narratives. Such behaviors are observable in Indonesians wearing shirts emblazoned with “Papua is Indonesia” and using social media to delegitimize the Free West Papua movement. This dynamic represents

individuals internalizing and reproducing dominant discourse, embedding themselves within structures of coercion and domination (Foucault, 1993).

Despite varied representational strategies regarding West Papua, they share a commonality: fetishizing West Papua as inherently Indonesian. Fetishism involves transforming a subject—be it a deity, community, or individual—into an object. Hall (1997) identifies this as a displacement process, where economic, political, and racial inequalities motivating Papuan independence aspirations are displaced and obscured by desirable representations such as banknotes or appropriated Papuan symbols. In other words, representation has become a preferred solution to addressing racial, political, and economic inequalities rather than resolving them.

Ultimately, this phenomenon exemplifies authoritarian populism. Hall (2018) argues authoritarian populism's distinct ability lies in generating active popular consent during crises. Within the Indonesian context, the state's increased law enforcement measures and restrictions on freedom of expression coexist with symbolic representations, such as incorporating a West Papuan hero in currency and appropriating Papuan cultural symbols, fostering public perception of inclusivity towards West Papua. Indonesian authoritarian populism distinctly operates through authoritarian measures materially while symbolically engaging in populist gestures, exemplifying the triumph of representation over material reality.

Conclusion

In an attempt to understand the role that the recent changes in Indonesian banknotes play in the present conjuncture, this study has applied Foucault's theory of representation via discourse to examine how unequal power relations enable and reinforce the discourse of pro-Indonesian integration as a dominant truth. Conversely, this discourse marginalizes and restricts the development of pro-West Papuan independence narratives. In this framework, banknotes function not merely as economic instruments but as disciplinary tools that construct and regulate West Papuan identity. West Papuans are rendered acceptable within Indonesian society only when they are subjected to and operate within the discourse of national integration. Furthermore, Foucault (1972) conception of power embedded within discourse elucidates how this constructed identity of West Papua generates new modes of behavior among Indonesians regarding how West Papuans are perceived, discussed, and represented.

Employing a Foucauldian analysis of discourse also allowed this study to situate the phenomenon of the redesigned banknotes within broader networks of representation. Through this lens, it becomes clear that the representation of West Papua has become fetishized—its complex political, economic, and racial struggles displaced by symbolic appropriation. However, as Hall (1997) critiques, this fetishism cannot be fully grasped without accounting for the underlying economic, material, political, and structural conditions that make it possible—factors that Foucault (1972, 1981) framework often overlooks. Thus, it is insufficient to treat discourse solely as an anticipation of the difference between language and practice. Instead, practices must be distinguished as either symbolic or material, a distinction critical for unpacking how power is enacted and legitimized.

To address this limitation, conjunctural analysis was employed to contextualize the representational strategy of banknotes alongside other parallel state discourse, including the

appropriation of Papuan cultural symbols and the political co-optation of pro-integration Papuan figures. This analysis reveals that representation itself has become a preferred solution to managing political, economic, and racial inequality in West Papua—displacing rather than resolving the real issues. This tendency reflects a core feature of authoritarian populism in Indonesia, where the state enforces repressive material controls while simultaneously deploying symbolic inclusivity to generate consent and stabilize dissent. In this context, representation triumphs over reality, making symbolic gestures a substitute for genuine structural change.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of viewing representation as a site of both ideological production and political struggle. Indonesian banknotes do more than commemorate national heroes; they participate in shaping geopolitical imaginaries, reinforcing state narratives, and disciplining subjectivities. Understanding this process requires a theoretical framework that accounts for both the symbolic force of discourse and the material structures that sustain it.

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