

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

From mandala to flowchart: Managerial governmentality and the evidentiary technologies of Indonesia's Reformasi

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Abstract

With the dissolution of an authoritarian regime, novel semiotic technologies are mobilized in the service of producing new political imaginaries. Through what visual and discursive practices can “democracy” be made visible? How can “good governance” be convincingly attested? This paper explores the evidentiary infrastructures of Indonesia's s-driven democratic transition to introduce a broader reflection on the role of graphic artifacts in disseminating neoliberal ideologies of transparency and managerial notions of “good governance.” Since the end of Suharto's authoritarian regime, a new genre of graphic artifacts has proliferated within Indonesian government offices: colorful vinyl banners with flowcharts and diagrams illustrating institutional mission statements, bureaucratic procedures, and administrative structures. Marking a clear departure from the traditional iconography of the mandala-like pre-democratic state, these flowcharts are only partially successful. Their aspiration to be iconic materializations of an efficient new mode of governance betrays widespread anxieties that the Reform Era has fallen short of its reformist promise.

KEYWORDS

digital technologies, graphic artifact, neoliberal good governance, post-Suharto Indonesia, semiotic landscapes, visualization devices

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ABSTRAK

Dengan runtuhnya suatu rezim otoriter, muncul kebutuhan akan teknologi semiotik yang bisa digunakan untuk menghasilkan imajinasi politik baru. Melalui praktik visual dan diskursif apa “demokrasi” bisa terlihat? Bagaimana “tatapamong” dapat dibuktikan secara meyakinkan? Tulisan ini berisi eksplorasi terhadap infrastruktur pembuktian yang digunakan di Indonesia untuk memperlihatkan pencapaian transisi demokrasi yang difasilitasi IMF. Demikian pula, disajikan salah satu pemahaman yang lebih luas mengenai peran artefak grafis dalam menyebarkan ideologi neoliberal tentang transparansi dan gagasan manajerial tentang “tatapamong.” Sejak berakhirnya rezim otoriter Suharto, muncul sebuah genre grafis baru. Kantor-kantor pemerintah di Indonesia dipenuhi dengan spanduk vinil warna-warni dan diagram-diagram alir yang menggambarkan misi institusi, prosedur birokrasi, dan struktur administrasi. Menandai penyimpanan yang jelas dari ikonografi tradisional negara prademokrasi yang mirip *mandala*, diagram-diagram alir ini hanya berhasil sebagian. Keinginannya untuk menjadi perwujudan ikonik bagi model pemerintahan yang baru dan efisien menunjukkan juga kecemasan bahwa Era Reformasi telah gagal memenuhi janji perubahannya.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: EVIDENTIARY TECHNOLOGIES OF POLITICAL CHANGE

Political transitions are rarely straightforward and immediate. Rather, they usually entail a complex mixture of drastic ruptures, gradual rearrangements, and enduring continuities. The complex set of social, cultural, political, and economic changes, which occurred in Indonesia with the advent of the Reform Era (“Era Reformasi”) following the 1998 demise of President Suharto’s authoritarian “New Order” regime are no exception (see, e.g., Nordholt, 2003: 551).ⁱ As scholars working on language and (political) reform have shown (Bate, 2021; Bauman, 1983; Cmiel, 1991; Donzelli, 2019; Fleming, 2023; Jackson, 2013; Kunreuther, 2014; Sidnell, 2021, 2023; among others), the end of autocratic and illiberal regimes and their replacement by purportedly more democratic systems is not only a matter of institutional and economic change. Indeed, political transitions always require visual and discursive technologies to corroborate their actual occurrence (Strassler, 2020). Which kind of semiotic resources and discursive practices are mobilized to make political change visible? Which technologies are used to visually produce and represent democratic transformations? What type of evidence is needed to attest the successful achievement of democratic reforms?

In this article, I attend to these questions by exploring the circulation of a new genres of “graphic artifacts” (Hull, 2012), namely the colorful billboards and plastic banners (*spanduk*) that saturate Indonesian administrative and governmental spaces with the aim of illustrating bureaucratic procedures and principles. Their content, which includes both texts and

images, ranges from anticorruption injunctions to elaborate flowcharts illustrating the various steps of paperwork procedures (see [Figure 1](#)), from institutional mission statements to diagrammatic representations of administrative structures ([Figure 2](#)), from guidelines for assessing excellence standards to instructions on how to file complaints for inadequate bureaucratic service (see [Figures 3, 4, and 5](#)). As we will see, aside from their immediate practical purpose and explicit semantic message, these multimodal artifacts play an important function in providing evidence of successfully achieved political reforms and offer a novel mode for representing the Indonesian statecraft.

While not a completely new type of office fixture, plastic banners made their appearance *en masse* in the late 2000s as a result of government programs to reform bureaucracy and enhance Indonesian civil servants' digital literacy and IT skills (Cahyarini & Samsara, 2021; Silitonga, 2023). Interestingly, contrary to what one might suppose, the creative making of these banners is only rarely outsourced to private graphic design businesses or printing stores and is generally produced in-house by government officials and administrators. As several of my interviewees have pointed out, graphic design software training and poster-making workshops have become, during the last few years, widespread forms of professional development for Indonesian civil servants (see also Agustino et al., 2020; Lase & Qomaruddin, 2022; Rouza et al., 2022). The new impulse toward in-service training is connected to a series of legislative efforts and government programs that have identified the improvement of employees' professional competences as a core component for the reform of Indonesia's bureaucracy and the eradication of corruption.ⁱⁱ

As the then-presidential candidate Joko Widodo (a.k.a. Jokowi) stated in a famous op-ed published by the newspaper Kompas on May 10, 2014, Indonesia's top priority concerns a radical change in the national political culture (*budaya politik*) in order to eliminate the state apparatus corruption, which is responsible for the country's political, socioeconomic, and emotional stagnation.ⁱⁱⁱ In the article (and in many statements he successively made as president-elect), Widodo (2014) emphasized how the profound institutional transformations



FIGURE 1 Flowcharts at the Jakarta Police headquarters illustrate the workflow to obtain: Certificate of police record (*surat keterangan catatan kepolisian*, or SKCK), certificate of police registration (*surat keterangan laporan diri*, SKLD), travel permit (*surat keterangan jalan*, SKJ), license for industrial/commercial explosives (*perizinan handak industri/komersial*), etc. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2016.)



FIGURE 2 Banner at the South Sulawesi Police station illustrating “the strategy for the enactment of the bureaucratic reform of South Sulawesi regional police.” The diagram enunciates the six core values (shortened in the central hexagram as M4KS, based on the first letter of each lexeme): Moral, Performance, Culture, Communication, Welfare, and Friendly/Generous. The values are superimposed over entrenched symbols: The Gold Rastra Sewakottama (a Kawi/Sanskrit motto meaning “The Nation’s Main Servant”), that is, the National emblem of the Indonesian Police (on the right) and the provincial emblem of the South Sulawesi Police (on the left). At the bottom, a visual montage depicts police officers proudly serving the civil society. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2016.)

accomplished since the demise of Suharto, were doomed to be ineffective without a profound change in the mindset of the political and bureaucratic apparatus. The need to perform a mental revolution (*revolusi mental*) became the signature point of Jokowi’s political agenda even through his second mandate (2019–2024).^{iv} Human resources (HR) improvement is framed as a process that is both ethical and cognitive. Indeed, aside from entailing the parallel enhancement of the moral integrity and the professional competence of the bureaucratic apparatus, the project posits the disclosure of information as one of the main prerequisites for ensuring a transparent and accountable governance based on democratic participation and on the permanent monitoring and evaluation of public services performance (Arifin & Yustia, 2022; Dwiyanto, 2008; Ismail, 2009).

In this light, governmental plastic banners have multiple functions. They are not simply a technology for disseminating information about bureaucratic procedures among the citizenry. Meant as discursive tools for the professional and ethical improvement of the country ASN (Aparatur Sipil Negara, State Civil Apparatus), these artifacts also express a new mode of national self-imagining and aim at demonstrating the achieved transition from a centripetal and concentrically organized state apparatus—traditionally epitomized by the quintessentially Indic diagrammatic icon of the mandala^v—to an efficiently decentralized



FIGURE 3 A freestanding banner in the waiting room of the Jakarta Immigration office, illustrates the “flow of the consultation service.” The “Gratis/no charge” red circle reminds the client/citizen that no bribe will be accepted. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2016.)

form of governance. In what follows, I contrast the traditional monumental representations of the state through the built environment (Graan, 2022) with that mediated by administrative banners and billboards. I analyze what I call (somewhat provocatively) a movement from the mandala to the flowchart, that is, an ongoing shift in the modes of “visualization” (Latour, 1986) and “spatialization” (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002) whereby the Indonesian state represents itself and the workings of its own bureaucracy.^{vi} Unlike the former iconographic repertoire made primarily of memorial monuments and architectural projects based on Indo-Buddhist cosmological references, the new visual apparatus for the representation of the reformed statecraft is made of temporary banners and billboards displaying charts and diagrams.

Originally developed by US industrial engineers in the 1920s and 1930s (Ensmenger, 2016), flowcharts are graphic tools used to synoptically document a sequence of operations and describe the course through which materials travels while undergoing manufacture. After becoming a popular representational technology within a wide range of manufacturing industries, flowcharts made (in the early 1960s) their appearance in the world of computer programming and software development (Ensmenger, 2016) to be later adopted (in the early 1990s) in Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Process Modeling (BPM) approaches as visual devices to represent and streamline work processes and business practices (Aguilar-Savén, 2004; Feigenbaum, 1991; Harrington, 1991).^{vii}

Departing from the ancient Indo-Buddhist cosmological references of the mandala-shaped memorial buildings, flowcharts hint at the modern world of industrial production and



FIGURE 4 Cartoonish figures in the top-right corner decorate a plastic banner aimed at illustrating the mechanism applicants should follow to file a complaint at a South Sulawesi office. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2016.)

technological development, and at the managerial rationality of corporate culture. This article thematizes the ongoing shifts in the visual production of the Indonesian state as an ideal transition from the mandalic iconography aimed at celebrating a centripetal model of the polity to managerial diagrams evocative of transparent accountability and business efficiency. Placing monumental displays and plastic insignia within the same analytic field may seem a comparative stretch. My endeavor, however, is not aimed at establishing a traditional comparison between pre-Reformasi public projects and post-Suharto bureaucratic communication.^{viii} Rather, my focus concerns the exploration of emerging visual technologies deployed in contemporary Indonesia to spatially represent the post-Suharto statecraft and attest its successfully achieved democratic transformation. To do so, I propose not a comparison but a contrastive juxtaposition between different “instruments of visualization” (Latour, 1986: 17), exemplified by two alternative diagrammatic forms: the mandala and the flowchart. Drawing on the wide-ranging concept of “semiotic landscape” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010),^{ix} my methodological approach combines systematic observations of Indonesian built environment and bureaucratic spaces, interviews with civil servants and graphic designers, as well as ethnographic analysis of Indonesian bureaucratic practices.^x In spite of their trivial and transient appearance (and of the relative scholarly neglect that surrounds them^{xi}), governmental banners and posters are a key semiotic technology of the new form of governmentality emerging in contemporary Indonesia.^{xii} Besides providing valuable insights into the rhetorical infrastructure of the country’s state apparatus, their analysis may open a broader reflection on the role of flowcharts and diagrams in disseminating neoliberal ideologies of



FIGURE 5 Cute-looking mascots at the South Jakarta Immigration offer citizen/customers compensation gifts (a mug or an umbrella) for slower than standard service. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2023.)

transparent accountability and managerial notions of “good governance” in Indonesia and beyond.

A distinctive feature of millennial capitalism concerns the interplay of two colliding and complementary discourses of transparency and conspiracy (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; West & Sanders, 2003). The contemporary diffusion of conspiracism, esoteric theories, and post-secularist magical thinking is paralleled by the proliferation of evidentiary regimes based on ideals of transparency and moral standards of accountability and individual entrepreneurialism (Bubandt, 2014; Gershon, 2011; Strathern, 2000; Urciuoli, 2008). Three decades ago, Hill and Irvine (1993) suggested that there is great analytic promise in the study of how linguistic resources are used in the social construction of truth and morality. I propose to extend Hill and Irvine’s (1993) insights beyond oral discourse to the visual circulation of graphic artifacts, in order to achieve a firmer grasp on contemporary ideologies of seeing and representing—what some scholars call a “scopic regime” (Jay, 1988).^{xiii} My analysis focuses not so much on the banners’ semantic content (i.e., their textual messages) but on their iconic and indexical properties, that is, on the visual and material features and the social history of the diagrams they display (where they originate from and which social world they point to).

Flowcharts have come to epitomize the visual order of audit culture (Strathern, 2000) and the managerial ethos of business efficiency. Originally deployed to trace the circulation of material substances, during the course of the twentieth century, they have been increasingly applied to abstract and immaterial processes (Ensmenger, 2016: 326). This shift culminated with their adoption in North-Atlantic post-Fordist managerial approaches

to labor and production, such as the Total Quality Management paradigm and other employee involvement practices based on the “premise that workers are more productive when they are empowered to take responsibility for the quality and quantity of their outputs.” (Urla, 2012: 74).^{xiv} Flowcharts' fortune within customer-satisfaction approaches to business management is not surprising. Aimed at providing an “unambiguous representation of reality” (Ensmenger, 2016: 329), flowcharts simultaneously reveal and control complexity by means of organizing work processes, identifying inputs, measuring outputs, assessing results, and allocate responsibility.

As we will see, flowcharts' prominent presence within the semiotic landscape of Reform Era Indonesia cannot be enclosed within a single interpretative frame. On the one hand, institutional flowcharts are clearly indicative of the introduction, within Indonesia's political sphere, of quality-assurance protocols for the consolidation of epistemic and scopic regimes congruent with a neoliberal political rationality. On the other hand, these charts and diagrams are perceived as genuine reformist tools of administrative improvement and individual professional enhancement, mediating hopes and anxieties for the incomplete democratic transition.

PLASTIC BANNERS AND BUREAUCRATIC REFORMS

It is a mid-summer morning of 2016. I am sitting in the waiting area of the Central Jakarta Immigration Office, in Jalan Merpati, ready to begin (what will turn out to be) a 1-month-long bureaucratic pilgrimage to obtain the paperwork required for undertaking a 9-month period of research in the remote area of upland Sulawesi where I have been doing fieldwork since the late 1990s. During the wait, my mind lingers back to memories of when, as a younger and more inexperienced researcher, I embarked on similar bureaucratic ordeals. I try to recall exactly how many times I went through the research permit drill and all the different governments that were in charge each time I applied for one. My first encounters with the Indonesian state date back to the final years of the New Order and run through the early phase of the Era Reformasi, in the early 2000s, and through the gradual transition into the so-called post-Reformasi (or *pasca*-Reformasi as they say in Indonesia), which is believed to have gradually begun after the 2004 election of General Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.^{xv} I still recall the trepidation transpiring from the recommendations I received at the time of my first applications; As one PhD student wrote to me in 1997 while, still an undergraduate, I was making arrangements for my first fieldtrip: “LIPI (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, ‘the Indonesian Institute of Sciences’),” which was then in charge of vetting foreign researchers' proposals “will go through your application in order to clear you as a ‘safe’ researcher.” “Your research proposal has to be as INNOCUOUS as possible,” reads another email I received in 2001 from another slightly more senior colleague, while I was preparing for my doctoral fieldwork, “you must avoid talking about sensitive subjects like ‘politics,’ or ‘conflict,’ or ‘ethnic tensions.’ If possible, transform these into positive-sounding terms like ‘social cohesion and harmony,’ ‘cultural values,’ ‘patronage networks,’ etc. Although Indonesia is no longer under the Suharto regime, the ‘intelligence agents’ who review the proposals are still working in that frame of mind, and no risks should be taken.”

Immigration offices' waiting rooms are special places endowed with the somewhat alchemic potential of giving an almost-material form to the usually imperceptible but always pervasive power of the state apparatus. These transitional settings have the capacity, as Graeber (2012: 105) puts it, to evoke “the boring, humdrum, yet omnipresent forms of structural violence that define the very conditions of our existence [...]” While I wait, the memories of the bureaucratic uncertainties I experienced in Indonesia and in other countries where I had to relocate during my career as immigrant-scholar inevitably resurface. I comfort myself

thinking that this is the first time I am applying under newly elected president Jokowi, the former governor of Jakarta and a civilian without any military background. His election in the summer of 2014 marked a watershed victory over the ex-general (and alleged war criminal) Prabowo Subianto, unleashing hopes for a substantial break with the military elite that maintained power even after the formal collapse of the New Order regime.^{xvi}

While I wait to be summoned, I mull over the Nawacita, the nine-point development program launched by Jokowi during his first 2014 presidential campaign, which emphasized the need for a more rapid, transparent, effective, and service-oriented bureaucracy (Diprose et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2022).^{xvii} In spite of the emphasis placed on streamlining bureaucratic procedures, my 2016 direct encounter with the Indonesian state apparatus did not reveal significant transformations had occurred in research permit procedure during the first 2 years of Jokowi's mandate. Still largely configured as a centralized top-down process, the system was designed to generate a spiral of letters produced in an organized progression from the Jakarta administrative headquarters to progressively lower level offices the researcher had to report to (*melapor*) by turning in the paperwork s/he had been provided with by the previous office. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the letters were typed-written in real time. Now they are digitally prepared and printed, but their content and sequence of production still follows a funnel-like structure of progressively decreasing levels of authority and inclusion.^{xviii} Indeed, in spite of the profound administrative devolution launched at the beginning of the millennium,^{xix} bureaucratic paperwork trails still follow a centralist system based on a five-tier architecture, largely derived from the colonial system of the Netherlands Indies.^{xx}

As Benda (1966: 597) wrote almost 60 years ago in relation to administrative reforms undertaken during the Dutch late colonial period: "clearly, decades of bureaucratic centralism could not suddenly be undone." However, while the top-down trail of letters evoked a verticalized and centralized officialdom, the physical space of the institutional settings I visited between 2016 and 2018 during my most recent extended period of pre-pandemic fieldwork presented a notable difference. Government offices were now decked with a plethora of glistening plastic banners and flashy colorful stickers. I began to inspect the novel graphic-cum-textual apparatus that had been hiding in plain sight for over a decade, without becoming the object of in-depth analytic attention.^{xxi}

Hanging on the office's walls, stuck on the doors and windows, and dangling from metal display-stands planted on the floor, the banners flaunted a mixture of bold primary colors, large sans-serifs typefaces, unrefined explanatory drawings, and a variety of flowcharts and diagrams. Commenting photographs of banners and posters I gathered between 2016 and 2018, a renowned Indonesian graphic designer specialized in creating political marketing campaigns, explained to me that these reflected the skills of their makers. Some were simply rudimentary PowerPoint printouts (see Figure 1) while others revealed competence (albeit amateurish) in more sophisticated graphic design software (as seen in Figures 2 and 3). Only rarely did the banners suggest a professional hand, indicating that that they had been made in partnership with private digital printing enterprises, or in collaboration with NGOs.^{xxii} The signs' semantic content went from the illustration of institutional mission statements, to anticorruption slogans, explanations of bureaucratic procedures, and visual descriptions of administrative structures.

The immigration office offered a full inventory of this new multimodal genre, which combines textual messages, visual icons, and graphic signs. On the glass entrance door, a colorful sticker featured a grotesque image of a large vile-looking rodent and a superimposed crossed-out red circle symbol next to a stern uppercase mandate (in Indonesian) "BASMI WABAH KORUPSI" ("eradicate the plague of corruption"). In the hallway leading to the waiting area, a freestanding banner displayed two near full-scale images of a couple of civil servants (a man and a woman) decked out in uniforms, their palms joined and placed in front

of the chest in a *salam sembah* gesture,^{xxiii} respectfully welcoming the customer/citizen. Written in Indonesian in uppercase letters, a text positioned to the left of the couple listed the main principles of the new concept of service-oriented administration: be friendly and polite, be ready to handle the customer's dissatisfaction, etc.^{xxiv} The walls of every office I visited in the following days and months were systematically covered with a mixture of colorful diagrams and written texts detailing the service consultation workflow, decision-making arrangements, as well as offices' organizational structures.

Made of printed sheets of PVC and vinyl, these banners are one of the most distinctive visual features of the post-Suharto and post-Reformasi semiotic landscape (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010).^{xxv} These plastic accessories owe their popularity to the introduction in Indonesia, during the first decade of the new millennium, of two separate but related technologies: image-editing software programs such as Coreldraw, Adobe Illustrator, and Adobe Photoshop (Luvaas, 2010); and large-format digital printers, that is, devices that can print computer-generated high-resolution images onto a broad range of materials (paper, plastic, wood, acrylic, and glass) and a much wider (up to 500 cm) surface than standard paper sizes. The relevance of these new technologies for understanding ongoing shifts within contemporary Indonesia's social imagination and cultural practice should not be overestimated.

The deployment, within government offices, of banners with anticorruption slogans and flowcharts grew significantly in the 2010s due to the increasing legislative emphasis on public service improvement (Laws No. 25/2009, No. 81/2010, No. 5/2014). Only apparently unrelated, the two phenomena contributed to the emergence of a new type of activity for Indonesian officials. Discussing how to foster transparent and accountable governance, a high-ranking civil servant based in Jakarta highlighted the benefits of enhancing national and regional administrators' digital skills to archive and disseminate information.^{xxvi} As my interlocutor explained to me, optimizing the employees' computer literacy is essential "to raise the service quality standards" (*untuk meningkatkan kualitas pelayanan*). Aside from basic programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel, or Powerpoint, my interlocutor stressed the importance of graphic design software such as Adobe Illustrator and Coreldraw, which could be used to make posters (*balaho*) and banners (*spanduk*) to "facilitate people's access to clear information" (*untuk memudahkan masyarakat memperoleh kejelasan informasi*) and thus promote "easy, efficient, swift, and transparent, procedures" (*prosedur yang mudah, efisien, cepat dan transparan*). Indeed, the visible display of clear information banners is often considered an important factor in assessing public service quality. In the periodic reports aimed at monitoring and measuring service standards and bureaucratic performance of specific offices, the presence of informational banners (*spanduk*) and the use of suggestion and complaint boxes (*kotak saran dan pengaduan*) are systematically praised as signs of efficient service.

As the origin of the word attests (*spandoek* is a Dutch term), banners are not a novelty within the Indonesia political landscape (Duille & Bens, 2017: 151–2). However, computer-made and digitally printed onto a plastic substrate, present-day institutional banners play a distinctive role within Indonesian political imagination. Originating from the intersection between material and immaterial factors (e.g., millennial technological innovations, collective anxieties for the incomplete democratic transition, legislative efforts to improve public service, managerial forms of governmentality), these plastic accessories are a core infrastructure of post-Suharto ideologies of "good governance." Aside from the specific information they may actually convey, these new artifacts have an important metasemiotic function: that of being performative icons and evidentiary devices of the successful implementation of new ideals of transparency and accountability. Their ultimate purpose transcends the mere exposition of the bureaucratic workflow and aspires to exemplify the shift (or the aspiration of a shift) toward a novel service-oriented democracy. By their very presence, the diagrams signify the underlying operations of a reformist political rationality whose goal is administrative efficiency and bureaucratic accessibility.

VISUALIZING GOOD GOVERNANCE TO REFORM CIVIL SERVANTS' MINDSET

On July 14, 2019, the newly reelected president of Indonesia Joko Widodo appeared in front of thousands of supporters at the Sentul Convention Center, in Bogor and delivered his victory statement.^{xxvii} Speaking with an unusually stern and nearly irate tone of voice, Jokowi outlined his *Visi Indonesia* (Vision of Indonesia), underscoring the urgency to “abandon entrenched political practices” (*meninggalkan cara-cara lama*) and “reform the bureaucracy” (*mereformasi birokrasi kita*). In a speech filled with long pauses, repetitions, emphatic iconic gestures,^{xxviii} and interspersed with loud cheers from the public, the president-elect menacingly called for the eradication of bureaucratic obstacles to investment licensing:

(TC: 8:12)

Hati-hati (0.2) *Hati-hati* (0.1). *ke depan?* (0.1) ((pointing finger, see Figure 6))

“This is a warning! Going forward”

ke depan. ((pointing finger)) *saya akan pastikan* (0.1) *akan saya kejar?* (7) ((pointing finger))

“Going forward, I guarantee I will hunt down [those inefficient civil servants]”

((Public ovation))

a:kan saya keja:r. *a:kan saya kontro:l.* *a:kan saya cek.* ((pointing finger))

“I will pursue and monitor them, I will check on them”

dan akan saya HAJAR KALAU DIPERLUKAN? ((pointing finger))

“And I will BEAT THEM UP IF THAT'S WHAT'S NEEDED OF ME”

((Public ovation))

Tidak ada lagi hambatan-hambatan investasi ((precision grip gesture))



FIGURE 6 Jokowi's pointing finger TC: 8:10.

“There will be no more barriers to [foreign] investment”

Karena ini adalah ((precision grip gesture)) *KUNCI PEMBUKA lapangan pekerjaan*

“Because this is the KEY TO CREATING job opportunities”

Jokowi highlighted that the changes he envisioned were not limited to the structural endeavor of streamlining procedures to promote an investment-friendly bureaucracy. Echoing the themes of his 2009 mental revolution platform, he stressed the need for a change in the mentality, attitude, and character of the state apparatus:

(TC: 9:30)

Sangat sangat ((precision grip gesture)) *penting bagi kita*

“It is very, very important for us”

Untuk mereformasi birokrasi kita ((precision grip gesture, see [Figure 7](#)))

“To reform our bureaucracy”

((Public ovation))

[...]

(TC: 9:50)

ini juga (0.1) *hati-hati*. (0.2) ((pointing finger))

“This is also a warning”

((Public ovation))

Kalau pola PIKER? (0.2) *kalau mindset?* (0.2) (head-pointing gesture) *birokrasi tidak berubah?* ((pointing finger))

“If the MENTAL patterns, the mindset of the bureaucracy does not change”

Saya pastikan ((pointing finger)) *akan saya PANGKAS?* ((horizontal air-slicing hand gesture, see [Figure 8](#)))

“I guarantee that I will CUT [the jobs of the civil servants who slow down bureaucracy]”

((Public ovation))

[...]

(TC: 11: 08)



FIGURE 7 Jokowi's precision-grip gesture TC: 9:10.



FIGURE 8 Jokowi's firing gesture TC: 10:07.

Begitu? Begitu? saya lihat tidak efisien? atau tidak efektif? ((pointing finger)) (5)

"The moment I see something that is inefficient or ineffective"

((Public ovation))

saya pastikan saya pastikan akan saya pangkas COPOT pejabatnya? ((precision grip gesture))

"I guarantee, I guarantee, I will cut, I will REMOVE the administrator in question"

((Public ovation))

There are two important features in Jokowi's speech that need to be emphasized for the purpose of my analysis. In the first place, it should be noted that Jokowi identified the source of the bureaucrats' outdated mentality and inefficiency in the ways they conducted their jobs, which he diagrammatically represented with a series of words and iconic hand gestures alluding to the "linjer" (a calque from the English 'linear'), repetitive, routine and monotonous qualities of traditional administrative work:

(TC: 13: 20)

Tidak a:da lagi pola pikir pola pikir lama. ((precision grip gesture)) (3)

"There is no more room for the old mindset"

((Public ovation))

Kita juga tidak ingin (1) ada lagi ((repeated precision grip gesture))

"We also no longer want"

Pola-pola kerja yang linier ((hand gesture mimicking a linear and flat surface, see Figure 9)) (2)

"Linear [and perfunctory] ways of carrying out [administrative] work"

((Public ovation))

Tidak ada lagi kerja-kerja yang hanya rutinitas ((chopping gesture, flat palm moving outward repeatedly slicing the air in downward motions, see Figure 10))

"No more work that is just routine"

Tidak ada lagi kerja kerja yang monoton, yang begitu begitu? saja. ((chopping gesture)) (3)

"No more monotonous work, [no more work] that is of mediocre quality"

((Public ovation))



FIGURE 9 Jokowi figurating linear ways of carrying out administrative work TC 13:37.



FIGURE 10 Jokowi figurating routine work TC 13: 44.

Jokowi's gestures work as indexical diagrammatic icons linking, through a process of "dynamic figuration" (Silverstein, 2004, 2014), the real-time unfolding of the speech and the actualization of a reformed bureaucratic order. When with a resolute stance he waves his admonishing finger at the audience, Jokowi is not simply speaking to the visible audience of the Bogor Convention Center, rather he is addressing the broader nationwide public of Indonesian civil servants. Through the rhythmically repeated reproachful strokes of pointing finger and precision-grip gestures (as seen in Figures 6 and 7), Jokowi not only enacts an authoritative stance, but is also able to diagrammatically figurate the deontic modality of the ought-to-be bureaucratic reform. Through highly stylized gestural sequences, Jokowi

“render[s] indexically present and thus effective in the real space-time of the here-and-now” (Silverstein, 2014: 448) the shift from the present realm of administrative malpractice (iconized by flat and monotonous repetitiveness of traditional paperwork, see Figures 9 and 10) and the transformative achievement of a new of bureaucratic work ethic.

(TC: 13: 56)

Tidak ada lagi kerja di zona nyaman?^{xxix} ((pointing finger)) (3)

“There is no more working in [your] comfort zone”

((Public ovation))

Penyakit kita ada di situ. ((accusatory pointing gesture)) (2)

“This is where our disease lies”

((Public ovation))

KITA harus berUBAH? ((pointing /precision grip finger plus thumb gesture)) (1)

“WE must CHANge”

((Public ovation))

KITA harus berUBAH? ((pointing /precision grip finger plus thumb gesture))

“WE must CHANge”

((Public ovation))

Sekali lagi? kita harus berubah?

“Once more, we must change”

In the second place, we should attend to the sheer emphasis placed on the need to bring forth change and to Jokowi’s commitment to take on the role of ultimate grantor of the enforcement of such change, which is represented by a stark contrast between his stern and willful attitude (the repeated precision-grip gesture and warning pointing finger) and a series of diagrammatic gestures aimed at iconizing flat monotony and linear repetitiveness of old-school bureaucrats’ *modus operandi* (see Figures 9 and 10).

In order to fully appreciate Jokowi’s appeal, we need to take a step back and describe how the managerial “good governance” paradigm first appeared within the Indonesian political landscape. The turn of the millennium marked a sea change for Indonesia. During the summer of 1997, a currency meltdown began in Thailand, spreading in a domino fashion to the other countries of the region and triggering a series of events that came to be known as the Asian Financial Crisis. Under the pressure of massive outflows of capital, the Indonesian government tried unsuccessfully to control inflation and salvage the corporate economy, which was “heavily reliant on unhedged US dollar denominated borrowings from global capital markets” (Hadiz & Robison, 2005: 225). Public and private debt spun out of control in a vicious spiral that quickly crushed state revenues, paralyzed national banks, and squashed the country’s major business groups, which became unable to repay their loans (Hadiz & Robison, 2004: 6; Sharma, 2001). The Indonesian government was forced to accept a \$43 billion international bailout along with a package of institutional policies and reforms.^{xxx} After three plus decades of economic growth and political stability, the New Order regime became the target of popular dissent and international criticism. Besieged by student demonstrations and communal conflicts, President Suharto resigned on May 21, 1998. The collapse of the regime not only stirred a wave of grassroots mobilization for democratic reforms but also provided a political opening for the imposition of structural adjustment programs designed by major lending institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The newly appointed President Habibie inaugurated (what soon became known as) the Era Reformasi. Characteristic of this new political phase was the mixture of neoliberal policies and democratic reforms. On the one hand, Habibie acknowledging the domestic and international charges against Suharto’s antidemocratic regime announced new parliamentary

elections (for the first time since 1955) and lifted the draconian constraints on the freedom of press that had been in force under Suharto (Strassler, 2020). On the other hand, in compliance with the IMF requests, Habibie initiated the implementation of distinctively neoliberal reforms (i.e., administrative decentralization, market deregulation, privatization of public services and state-owned enterprises, etc.), which, in the following two decades, completely transformed Indonesia's institutional makeup from “one of the most centralized systems in the world into one of the most decentralized” (World Bank, 2003: 1).

As Moore (1993: 1) pointed out, since the mid-1990s, “political conditionality” has determined aid allocation by international development organizations and transnational lending agencies. The foreign analysts of the IMF (1998) and the World Bank (1998) identified the culprit factors for the Asian Financial Crisis in the lack of good governance and demanded corrective measures to redress entrenched corruption, ensure transparent accountability and democratic participation, and implement administrative decentralization.^{xxxi}

As many scholars of Indonesia and beyond have pointed out, the World Bank-IMF good governance paradigm is based on technocratic assumptions, market-driven prescriptions, and neoliberal principles, and on the deployment of a moralizing discourse aimed at depoliticizing structural dynamics (Gellert, 2010; Glassman & Carmody, 2001; Li, 2021: 613–14; Muir & Gupta, 2018; Tidey, 2016). Like its discursive predecessor, “development,” “good governance” operates as an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson, 1994), that is, a technocratic value-free approach to politics that systematically ignores the specific articulation of local power dynamics and promotes the “denial of social conflict” (Hadiz, 2004: 670).^{xxxii} In this light, “good governance” is aimed at recasting “governing activities as non-political and non-ideological problems that need technical solutions” (Ong, 2006: 3). Like its sister notions of “best practices” and “quality assurance,” “good governance” universalizes as indisputably “good” (and thus not open for criticism) what are in fact specific values and then, through disciplinary practices of moral cooptation, makes individuals responsible for their implementation. Aimed at streamlining bureaucratic procedures to create “world-class service” and facilitate foreign investments, Jokowi's proposed “development of human resources” (*pembangunan sumber daya manusia*) through a change of mindset, character, and attitude fits perfectly within this individual-centered, empowerment-driven, and management-oriented political rationality.

But if, as the president claimed in his Vision of Indonesia speech, the disease that affects Indonesian public service stems from the repetitive and monotonous nature of bureaucratic labor, where does the cure lie? As claimed by a growing body of domestic studies in public management and administration, the development of digital skills and IT competence by means of formal education and hands-on practical training are core resources for achieving employees' mental revolution (see among others, Anggraeni, 2014: 428; Cahyarini & Samsara, 2021; Tjiptoherijanto, 2007). Indeed, “digital literacy can no-longer be viewed as just a technical challenge; it requires a broader change in mindset and management” (Silitonga, 2023: 78).

As one Sulawesi government official explained to me, improving the digital skills of the administrative staff who live even in the most remote area is part of a larger project of in-service, permanent training, and lifelong education.^{xxxiii} My interlocutor pointed out how aside from ensuring a solid competence in more basic programs (Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel), the ongoing organization of partnerships with IT departments of local Universities^{xxxiv} aimed at training civil servants in more sophisticated programs such as Coreldraw and Photoshop, which may be used to “design posters and banners to disseminate information for the citizens' benefit” (*mendesain poster dan spanduk yang bisa digunakan untuk memberikan informasi para warga*) and also to “boost the employees' creativity” (*meningkatkan kreatifitas pejabat*) and thus enhance their “performance” (*kinerja*). Interestingly, rather than being addressed to patrons, the banners seem to be made for the benefit of the office staff

to simultaneously train them in the new graphic design technologies and socialize them to the principles of quality-driven service. Indeed, office visitors tend to ignore the banners. During my frequent calls at Indonesian offices between 2016 and 2018, I have never been able to observe other office-goers gazing at or reading the banners' content, which, in spite of their flamboyant appearance, seemed to go largely unnoticed.

These governmental banners thus appear to have multiple functions. On the one hand, by stimulating individuals' inventiveness and digital skills, their very production process can help restructure civil servants' moral character. On the other hand, their circulation serves to ensure efficient transparency (through the clear dissemination of information), while simultaneously manufacturing a convincing representation of the reformed Indonesian officialdom.

As mentioned earlier, since the early 1990s flowcharts have gained increasing popularity as visual devices for the representation of human interactions within the flexibility-driven restructuring of the workplace in the United States and beyond (Aguilar-Savén, 2004). Flowcharts' success within the neoliberal post-Fordist context derives from their social history and origins in the world of industrial and digital production, as well as from their actual visual properties. In the first place, through the graphic deployment of curved and straight lines, they depict the relentless flow of actions and information, conjuring images of frictionless cooperation and corroborating the belief in the causal efficacy of new information technologies. In the second place, by applying to power-laden social dynamics among humans diagrammatic techniques originally developed for representing the circulation of material objects, flowcharts suggest the possible erasure of socioeconomic conflict, evoking a problem-solving managerial rationality and the denial of the inherently political and selective nature of all forms of seeing and representing. Resonating with the neoliberal corporate rhetoric of flexibility, entrepreneurialism, and empowerment, the diagrams embellishing Indonesian institutional banners are particularly well suited for operationalizing improvement-driven and quality assurance approaches to workflow organization. By flattening out onto a unified visual plane an otherwise temporally disjointed and heterogeneous set of activities, flowcharts produce a self-contained space and a synoptic representation of diachronic processes, promoting practices of periodic assessment and flexible readjustment—two cornerstones of the neoliberal managerial approaches to political and workplace restructuring. In so doing, they project a sense of discontinuity with respect to the pre-Reform representations of the state.

FROM THE CENTRIPETAL STATE TO THE NEW SEMIOTIC INFRASTRUCTURES OF DEMOCRACY

In his seminal work on imagined communities, Anderson ([1982] 1991) claimed that all polities need to develop political imaginings of themselves. More recently, Ferguson and Gupta (2002: 981) called for a closer analysis of the “images, metaphors, and representational practice” whereby “the state comes to be understood as a concrete, overarching, spatially encompassing reality.”

A prominent iconographic trope for the representation of Southeast Asian kingdoms has been that of the *māṇḍala* (“circle” in Sanskrit)—a symbolic diagram of Indo-Tibetan origin, which in various Hindu-Buddhist civilizations functions as a representation of both the structure of the universe and the spiritual progression toward enlightenment. Composed of two elements—a core/essence (*manda*) and a container or enclosing element (*la*) (Tambiah, 1973: 3)—the *māṇḍala* encodes the idea of concentric encompassment and operates as a performative cosmograph. Its graphic representation may vary, but it generally consists of a square enclosing a circle, or as a series of overlapping squares or concentric circles, thus pointing to the constitutive features of centripetality, symmetry, and cardinal points (Tambiah, 1973). Aside from its mystical and cosmological function, the *māṇḍala* has

a long-standing geopolitical application. The concept is found in a number of ancient Indian treatises on statecraft (as well as in later Southeast Asian Hindu-Buddhist sources) as a model of and for inter-polity relationships (Druce, 2017).^{xxxv}

Temples and royal cities in historic India, China, and Southeast Asia were configured according to a mandalic diagram. The ancient Khmer capital of Angkor (in present-day Cambodia) and the famous Borobudur shrine in Central Java (see Figure 11), for example, are designed in the shape of the *māṇḍala* (Esposito, 2018), that is, topographically organized around a center positioned within a square, which in turn is divided into quadrants corresponding to symmetrical cardinal points and linked to strategic gateways.^{xxxvi} A number of scholars have argued that the *māṇḍala* constitutes a powerful “heuristic device” (Reynolds, 2006: 40–41) for the understanding of precolonial Southeast Asian political formations (Anderson, [1972] 1990; Errington, 1989; Geertz, 1980; Heine-Geldern, 1942; Tambiah, 1973; Wolters, [1982] 1999).

According to the doctrine that Geertz (1980) called “of the exemplary center,” political units were traditionally arranged as “nested *māṇḍalas*” (Wolters, [1982] 1999) or “galactic polities” (Tambiah, 1973). Emanating from powerful cores through concentric circles, political control was based on the capital and on the charismatic power of the ruler, displayed through an elaborate choreography of symbolic and ritualistic practices (see also Anderson, [1972] 1990).

Images of centripetal encompassment are also key in the political iconography of post-colonial Indonesia. Both Sukarno and Suharto drew extensively on the mandalic repertoire either through open references to the thalassocratic empires of Srivijaya in South Sumatra (7–12th century), Sailendra (8–12th century), and Majapahit (1293–1527) in Java, or by appealing to a centralist political topography (Anderson, [1972] 1990: 176; Baldwin, 2020: 117; Errington, 1997; Pemberton, 1994; Wood, 2005: 41).^{xxxvii} Mandalic emblems extensively populate the postcolonial self-representation of the nation-state and the semiotic landscapes of Indonesia’s capital Jakarta and of other urban centers.^{xxxviii} A powerful iconography of “vertical encompassment” (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002) imbued several forms of pre-Reformasi national self-imagining, both through graphic design (e.g., signs, drawings, and pictures)

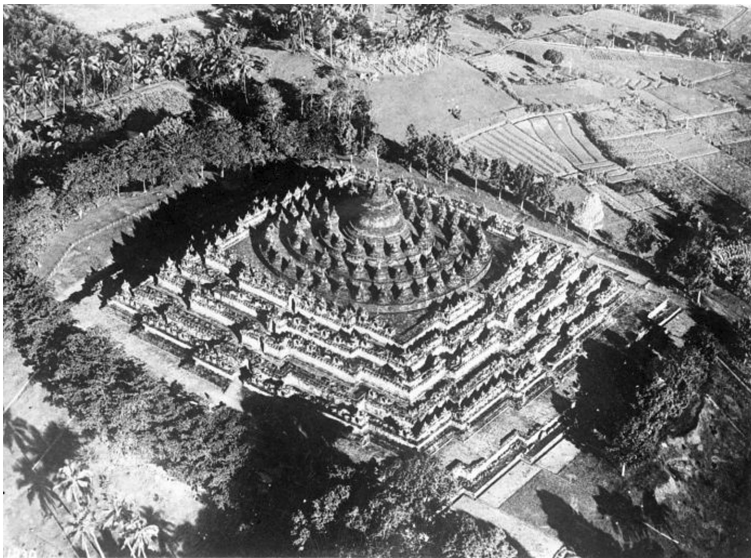


FIGURE 11 Aerial view of the ninth century Buddhist temple in Central Java, Indonesia, 1929. Photo courtesy: Tropenmuseum, part of the National Museum of World Cultures, Fotostudio Luchtvaart Afdeling Bandoeng, photographer unknown. CC BY-SA 3.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.

and built environment (e.g., memorial monuments and architectural elements). The former included the royal umbrella, the sacred mountain, and the banyan tree (tellingly the icon of Suharto's political party, the Golkar, and of the Ministry of Home Affairs until 2020), which all evoked an Indic kingly imagery of encompassment. The latter included the dissemination across Indonesia's cities of *tugu* (monuments, generally in the shape of tall obelisks meant to cosmologically represent the *axis mundi*) and the burgeoning profusion of vernacular architectural motifs, such as the Javanese pillared pavilion (*pendopo*) and indigenous roof designs (Waterson, 1990), such as the *joglo*, a four-sided pyramid-shaped roof supported by columns. Both the *pendopo* and the *joglo* provide metaphorical embodiments and physical representations of centripetal inclusion by means of "radially symmetrical spaces with high centers that symbolize the encompassment of lesser, dependent beings by and under the high-status being at the center of the space" (Errington, 1997: 8).

The rhetoric of the exemplary center is, for example, apparent in the propagandistic architectural projects conceived under Sukarno's presidency (1949–1966) and later by Suharto (1966–1998). During his tenure as first president of Indonesia, Sukarno, himself an architect by training, developed a master plan of monumental undertakings aimed at turning the capital's urban space into a strategic nation-building instrument. Aside from changing street and place names that referred to Dutch colonial presence, Sukarno sponsored the construction of a number of monumental buildings aimed at boosting national pride and celebrate the newly liberated postcolonial state. The National Monument (Monumen Nasional, or Monas) is the probably the most emblematic example of these endeavors (see Figure 12).^{xxxix} Lying at the center of Medan Merdeka (Liberation Square), a squared pillar sitting on square-shaped base (evocative of the Hindu dyadic symbol of fertility, the *yoni-lingga*) and surmounted by a golden flame, Monas is an *axis mundi*, that is, a monumental representation of a centripetal cosmology that connects the ancestral underworld (symbolized by the historical museum hosted in the monument's basement) with the celestial upper-world symbolized by the flame. As Nas (1993: 21) points out, Monas constitutes the axis of a centripetal "symbolic ecology" of imaginary concentric circles. Other similar monuments were established across Indonesia's major metropolitan centers in the second half of the twentieth century: the Heroes' Monument (Tugu Pahlawan) in Surabaya (1952), the Statue for the Battle of



FIGURE 12 The National Monument (Monas), Jakarta, 2010. Photo courtesy: Gunawan Kartapranata. CC BY-SA 3.0. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.

Medan Area (Tugu Perjuangan Medan Area) in Medan (1969), the Mandala Monument in Makassar (1995), etc.

The conjuring of a centripetal national imagination was further developed during president Suharto's rule. This is seen, for instance, in the architecture of the national cultural theme park Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park) located on the outskirts of Jakarta and built in the late 1970s by Ibu Tien, the wife of President Suharto. Loosely modeled on Disneyland (Pemberton, 1994: 152), the park constituted a majestic effort whereby the New Order nation-state could evoke an image of itself as centripetally organized. As Errington (1997: 25) points out, the entire park can be read as a "centered space" arranged around a unitary central axis surrounded by an "orderly and lower-status periphery." Within this cultural park, Indonesia's different provinces are metonymically represented by an inventory of the typical houses of Indonesia's indigenous groups, which are positioned around a central artificial lake, itself containing a map of the archipelagic nation-state.

The mandalic cosmology also features prominently in the Sukarno-Hatta airport, which, through its centripetal layout and its extensive deployment of *joglo*-roof elements, provides a diagrammatic encompassing of center-peripheries relations (Errington, 1997). Built during the New Order (1977–1992), the Jakarta international hub is another semiotic dispositive of national self-imagining mediated by the deployment of important vernacular architectural elements, such as indigenous Javanese roofs and pillared pavilions, as well as decorative motifs from outer islands, which earned it the 1992 Aga Khan Award for Architecture for its capacity of integrating traditional architectural motifs with the surrounding landscape.

Against this background, the colorful diagrams and flowcharts embellishing the walls of government offices throughout the archipelago should be understood as a new mode of visualizing the state—one based not on centripetal monumentality, but on an alternative form of governance. As Karen Strassler argues (2020), images are central to the formation of the new political imaginaries that emerged in Indonesia since the millennium. After a three-plus-decade dictatorship that had been characterized by fierce censorship, erasure of political opposition, and silencing of public debate, the transition to the Era Reformasi unsurprisingly emphasized ideals of popular participation and inaugurated a new epistemology of transparent accountability, an emphasis on the hyper-visibility of administrative mechanisms, and a scopic regime based on the evidentiary status of visual images as neutral windows to objective truth.

Although the new infrastructures for the representation of the polity have not fully replaced the pre-Reform ones, there are several important differences between the two. The mandala and the flowchart exemplify two different diagrammatic modalities for the kinetic and visual representation of power. Whereas the flowchart conjures a smooth and frictionless movement, the mandala's centripetal structure culminates in immobility at the center—transcending the earthly plane of existence and the contingencies of its relentless movement, the mandalic *axis mundi* is perfectly still. Within the mandala-shaped monuments, the visible outer perimeter gradually shifts into the progressively opaque inner areas and the core of the mandala, inhabited by the divine immobile king, is removed from sight. The mandala is an iconic diagram of a conception of power marked by an epistemology of secrecy and invisibility and by an ethics of nonaction, silence, and immobility (Anderson, [1972] 1990; Geertz, 1980). The flowchart is instead an emblem of contemporary evidence-based ideals of transparency and moral paradigms of accountability hinging on the possibility of a clear visual representation of workflow processes of input and output.^{x1}

Contrary to the static fixity of the mandalic diagrams aimed at celebrating the stability of the political status quo, the new institutional banners display vibrant charts made of lines and arrows as graphic and material embodiments of a dynamic and future-oriented polity. Instead of deploying retrospective references to ancient kingdoms of the past, the new diagrams hint at the global modernity of efficient management. Unlike the grandiose character

of the monumental displays, the plastic banners are distinctively unpretentious and low-key and display an ordinary affective quality. Stuck on the wall with precarious pins or standing on wobbly floor-stands, they look provisional and unimportant. They can be easily disposed or replaced. Instead of evoking the perpetuity of memorial buildings and ceremonial monuments, the banners materialize the fleeting temporality of administrative office visits and the ephemeral timespan of an occasional bureaucratic application. Unlike the solemn character underlying the representations of the pre-Reformasi era, the new banners are often decorated with cartoon character images, which (as an Indonesian graphic designer explained to me) are generally downloaded from the web to provide stylized representations of either the customer-citizen/addressee or the employees (as seen in Figures 4, 5, and 13). Throughout the month of January 2023, I showed some images of these cute-looking, cartoonish, or mildly caricature-like anthropomorphic creatures to several Indonesian citizens to elicit their reactions. One of my interlocutors pointed out that these illustrations aimed at “grabbing citizens’ attention so prompting them to read the textual information displayed on the banner” (*menarik perhatian kita untuk melihat dan membaca*). Another interviewee noted that these figures are indicative of the post-New Order era: “Now,” he explained to me, “the atmosphere is different (*sekarang suasananya sudah berbeda*). Previously it was very formal and stiff (*dulu sangat resmi, sangat kaku*), everything was really stiff and bureaucratic (*kaku sekali, sangat birokrasi*), now it is more humane (*sekarang lebih humanis*.)” The colorful diagrams and the cute or funny images help create a benevolent representation of an accessible administration and an approachable and user-friendly bureaucracy.



FIGURE 13 Caricature-like funny-looking figures on a plastic banner at the Jakarta immigration office. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2016.)

Unlike the allegorical and allusive style of the monumental and discursive technologies deployed during the rule of Sukarno and Suharto, the new semiotic infrastructures mobilize an explicatory and expository mode of signification. While the propagandistic pre-Reformasi monuments required historical knowledge and interpretative work to be understood as reenactments of Indic models and centripetal celebrations of state power, the present-day flowcharts and diagrams are meant to be self-evident and straight-forward descriptions of workflow processes of input and output. Their metasemiotic mode of signification is independent from the cultural symbolism of pre-Reformasi emblems, which to be decoded required historical and culturally specific references. The flowcharts, instead, are iconic and indexical enactments of the global meta-language of corporate speak, which does not require local-specific knowledge of the semantic meaning of Sanskrit/Kawi mottos such as *Rastra Sewakottama* (“People’s Main Servants”) or *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (“Unity in Diversity”), nor it makes symbolic reference to emblems like the banyan tree embellishing political and institutional logos, or to the *lingga-yoni* (pestle and mortar) Hindu-Buddhist shape of Monas monument.

Contrary to the pyramidal imaginary that for over three decades had depicted the Indonesian state as a nested structure of hierarchical relations and top-down procedures, the new emphasis on transparent “good governance” is visually represented through a multifarious set of diagrams and charts: a dynamic, decentered, and efficient state that, in line with the Nawacita ideology, develops from the peripheries.

CONCLUSION

Political transitions always require semiotic infrastructures that can make them visible and corroborate their actual occurrence. In spite of the frequently flaunted master narrative of radical rupture from the New Order past, the Indonesian political imagination is haunted by a generalized sense of anxiety for the incomplete reforms. While the concern for the shortcomings of the bureaucratic apparatus pervaded Jokowi’s inaugural speech, becoming a defining feature of his presidential rhetoric, Indonesian public sphere is also deeply marked by a widespread perception of the Reformasi as a disappearing horizon. Since the 2004 election of Susilo Bambang Yodhoyono as president, Indonesia has witnessed “increased efforts to regulate the media and public expression” (Strassler, 2020: 254) and a gradual replacement of the early post-Suharto political euphoria with diffuse discontents over the promised reforms. Echoing Jokowi’s reiterated calls for a mental revolution to reach world-class governance, one of my interviewees stated that the reforms of post-Suharto era have only changed the skin (*kulitnya*) of the apparatus, not its inner core (*intinya*). Quoting a famous saying concerning bureaucrats’ entrenched habit of taking advantage of the complexity of paperwork to extort money in exchange for favors, my interlocutor complained: “officials (*pejabat*) still follow the old motto: ‘if you can make it harder, why make it easier (*jika bisa dipersulit kenapa harus dipermudah*)?’”^{xli} A similar concern also surfaces in the domestic literature on public management: a core aspect of the reform of the bureaucratic apparatus entails eradicating the self-serving mentality of the *pryayi* (the Javanese traditional administrative upper class) and deploying mental and character education to establish “not only output-oriented but also result- and benefit-oriented” service (Purbolaksono, 2015: 5). Indeed, the alleged inefficiency and lack of transparency of the bureaucracy has long been responsible for the lower ranks assigned to Indonesia in the annual “Doing Business” reports issued, since 2003, by the World Bank with the aim of ranking countries based on the “ease of doing business” (McLeod, 2006: 275).

Markedly different from the largely hidden pre-Reformasi paperwork (typewritten letters, stamps, envelopes, and folders), the hyper-visible present-day governmental banners constitute a new genre of graphic artifacts that is now being produced by Indonesian bureaucrats. Marking

a clear departure from the traditional iconography of the mandala-like pre-democratic centripetal state, the Reform-Era flowcharts aspire to be iconic materializations of the new transparently accountable officialdom. While their explicit and immediate goal is to illustrate administrative processes (for the sake of “transparency”) and make them available to wider public scrutiny (for the sake of “accountability”), these plastic banners are important technologies for two separate but related endeavors: the moral reformation of bureaucrats' inner consciousness and the public demonstration of the achieved transition from a centripetal and concentrically organized statecraft to the alternative managerial rationality of a reformed polity based on good governance.

While waiting to be summoned in the Jakarta Immigration office, I try to keep my Kafkaesque anxieties in check. I gaze at the plastered brochure I was given the previous day at the Foreign Research Permit Division of the Ministry of Research and Technology (see Figure 14). The colorful flowchart neatly illustrates the different steps of the “pre-arrival” research permit procedures. I realize that I obviously got the wrong chart since I am already in the country and I actually would need guidance on the post-arrival procedures. But somehow the smooth graphics and seamless representation of the process have a reassuring and comforting effect. I take a closer look and notice the statement (in English) at the bottom, which reads: “Total time since application to approval decision: 2 weeks. Plus processing the visa: 2 weeks.” I think back to the 7-month wait (one for approval plus six for processing the visa). “You have been unlucky,” I am told, “there has been a bandwidth issue that slowed down the upload of the paperwork during the approvals transmission to the consulates.”

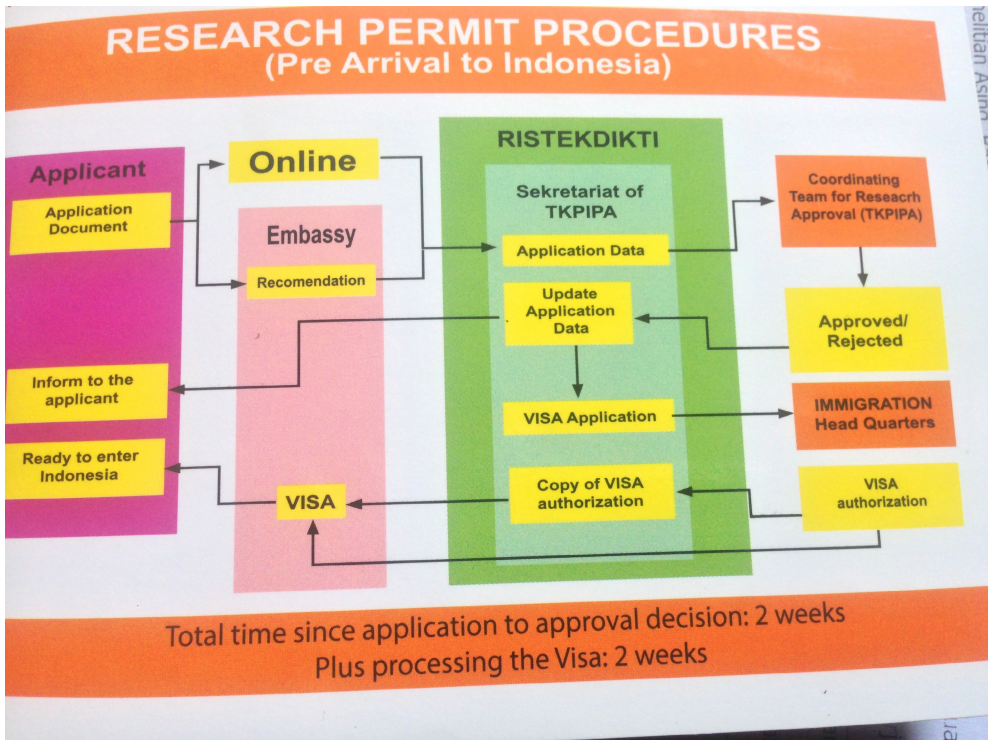


FIGURE 14 Plastic brochure from RISTEK. (Photo courtesy by the author, 2016.)

I take another look at the plastic apparatus that surrounds me.

The diagrams and flowcharts now seem to ambiguously float between the status of *image of* and *image for* (to paraphrase Geertz). If on the one hand they aspire to represent a successful transition to a more democratic, efficient, and accountable world, on the other hand, they actually betray the anxiety that the Reformasi has fallen short of its promise.

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ENDNOTES

- ⁱThe "New Order" followed two decades of Sukarno's presidency (from the declaration of independence to the 1965 coup). Far from being peaceful, the transition was marked by a period of social unrest and ferocious repression during which hundreds of thousands of presumed communist militants and sympathizers were massacred; see Roosa (2006).
- ⁱⁱSee, Law No. 43/1999 on Civil Service Administration, Law No. 25/2009 on Public Service, Law No. 5/2014 on State Civil Administration, Presidential Regulation No. 101/2000 on Education and Training of Civil Servants, Presidential Regulation No. 81/2010 on Grand Design of Bureaucracy Reformation 2010–2025. These legislative efforts are also connected with Law No. 30/2002 on the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi or KPK), which became operative in 2003.
- ⁱⁱⁱTo denote this collective condition of emotional dissatisfaction, Jokowi specifically used the slang term *galau* ("troubled"), which indicates a state of sadness and confusion. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/05/10/1603015/Revolusi.Mental>.
- ^{iv}Jokowi retrieved the notion of "revolusi mental," along with several other elements of his ideological arsenal, from Sukarno, the founding father of the Indonesian Republic, who spoke about it in famous oration delivered on August 17, 1957 (Hauswedell, 1973).
- ^vThe mandala is a symbolic diagram used across various Hindu-Buddhist civilizations to represent the cosmological order. According to Peirce (1931–1958: 2.277), diagrams are a subclass of icons (the others being images and metaphors) that represent the relations of an object "by analogous relations in their own parts." Throughout this article, I use the term "centripetal" to refer to a spatial arrangement aimed at foregrounding the role of a geopolitical and symbolic center of power. Thus, my use of "centripetal" should not be understood in a strictly Bakhtinian sense as a drive toward a unitary and homogeneous language.
- ^{vi}My phrasing should be taken with a modicum of caution, for the imaginary shift from the mandala to the flowchart is not to be understood as a definitive and all-encompassing process. While mandalic references still pervade the visual and practical representations of the Indonesian state apparatus, the proliferation of flowcharts should be taken seriously as a significant component of the cumulative and minuscular processes that underlie the material and cognitive construction of post-Suharto statecraft.
- ^{vii}BPM refers to a unified system of modeling techniques consolidated in the early 1990s to illustrate business processes by means of standardized use of flowcharts and other types of diagrams (Aguilar-Savén, 2004). TQM is based on the idea that long-term business entails the continuous improvement of customer's satisfaction and employees' empowerment.

- ^{viii} Put differently, the object of this article is not Indonesia's memorial architecture nor its bureaucracy, but how the post-Reformasi emphasis on transparent accountability has produced the spread, within governmental spaces, of graphic artifacts that originate from alternative social worlds such as industrial engineering, computer programming, and management organization.
- ^{ix} Largely based on the multimodal intersection of verbal language, visual discourse, and the semiotic construction of space, the notion of semiotic landscape encompasses "any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010: 2).
- ^x Data were collected in Jakarta and South Sulawesi (Toraja and Makassar) during 9 months of intermittent fieldwork (2016–2018) and follow-up visits in 2019 and 2023.
- ^{xi} But see Stodulka's (2022) compelling analysis of emotive banners in Kupang.
- ^{xii} Unlike previous forms of sovereign power over *territories*, governmentality is a political technology whereby control over *populations* is produced through the "government of the self" and the "government of souls and lives" (Burchell et al., 1991: 87).
- ^{xiii} According to Feldman (1997: 30), "a scopic regime is an ensemble of practices and discourses that establish truth claims, typicality, and credibility of visual acts and objects and politically correct modes of seeing."
- ^{xiv} The global financial crisis and economic recession of the early 1980s marked the decline of the Fordist approach to mass production and the rise of neoliberal political-economic practices based on "deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (Harvey, 2005: 2). Emblematic of the "flexibility turn" and "employee involvement" practices, TQM "found growing application within the largest American corporations during the late 1980s" (Vallas, 1999: 81).
- ^{xv} The post-Suharto period could be divided between a first period of optimism about the possibility of a real political change—the actual Reform Era that generally coincides with the first years after Suharto's resignation and corresponds to the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid (1999–2000) and Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001–2004)—and a post-Reformasi period, which has been marked the gradual erosion of freedom of press and public expression (Strassler, 2020: 254).
- ^{xvi} A former in-law to President Suharto, Prabowo is renowned for his alleged involvements in human rights abuses in West Papua and East Timor and for the abduction and torture of pro-democracy activists during the months precluding Suharto's overthrow. Space limitations prevent me from providing an in-depth account of Indonesia's recent political history, but it is worth noticing that in October 2019, Jokowi appointed Prabowo Subianto, as Defense Minister in his new cabinet. In February 2024, thanks also to Jokowi's backing, Subianto was elected as Indonesia's eight President in a landslide victory.
- ^{xvii} Derived from Sanskrit, Jokowi's Nawacita, lit. "nine" (*nawa*) "hopes" (*cita*), includes (1) protection of Indonesian citizens; (2) implementation of good governance; (3) development of Indonesia's peripheries; (4) eradication of corruption; (5) improvement of the quality of life of the people; (6) improvement in productivity and global competitiveness; (7) economic independence; (8) mental revolution; and (9) strengthening of Indonesia's unity in diversity.
- ^{xviii} Interestingly, the major corrective to the centralized administrative workflow has concerned the paperwork for business investors and the effort to establish "one-stop integrated licensing services" (Pelayanan Terpadu Satu Pintu, PTSP) under the purview of local authorities, which was enabled by the Investment Law No. 25/2007 and gradually implemented in the following decade.
- ^{xix} See for example, the National Laws No. 22/1999 on Regional Governance, No. 25/1999 on the fiscal balance between center and regions, No. 32/2004 concerning Regional Administration. It should be noted, however, that in 2014 that the passing of the new Law No. 23/2014 on Local Government and the Village Law No. 6/2014 revised prior legislation reintroduced measures aimed at strengthening the central government's authority and rearrange the distribution of responsibilities across all administrative levels.
- ^{xx} The current subdivision in five main tiers (central state, provinces, urban municipalities and rural regencies, sub-districts, and urban suburbs and rural villages) resembles the colonial administrative architecture, which was arranged around decreasing levels of hierarchical inclusion under the authority of the general governor (Gubernur Jendral): the province-like level of the *Gewest* (later renamed *Residentie*), the *Afdeeling*, the *Onderafdeelingen*, the *District*, and the *Onderdistrict*.
- ^{xxi} I am referring in particular to the banners and poster that furnish indoor bureaucratic spaces. For analyzes of political and institutional street banners, see Stodulka (2022), Duile and Tamma (2021), and Duile and Bens (2017).
- ^{xxii} Interview with Pak Aziz (a pseudonym), August 3, 2023.
- ^{xxiii} The gesture of dharmic origin is widespread in Southeast Asia and commonly used in the hospitality industry.

- ^{xxiv}The new emphasis on service is typical of the market-centered model of public administration (Donzelli, 2019: 70–81).
- ^{xxv}To uncover the social context surrounding their diffusion, I conducted a series of interviews with Indonesian graphic designers, as well as with both upper and lower administrative echelons. My interviewees agree that institutional plastic banners followed the introduction in 2003–2004 of Large Format Printing (LFP), but became a prominent feature of governmental furnishing only in the early 2010s.
- ^{xxvi}Interview with Pak Syamsul (a pseudonym), July 3, 2023.
- ^{xxvii}The transcript of the full speech is available at <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/07/15/06204541/pidat-o-lengkap-visi-indonesia-jokowi>, for the video go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCrS7UN9Qxk> (last access to both links May 11, 2024). I am using here a simplified version of the Jeffersonian transcript system: line numbers are replaced with “TC” marking the time code of each transcribed fragment, numbers in parentheses indicate pauses in seconds or tenths of seconds, CAPITALIZATION is used for higher volume; /./ for falling intonation; /?/ rising intonation; /:/ for elongation of the prior sound.
- ^{xxviii}Aside from a series of diagrammatic gestures aimed at iconizing flat monotony and linear repetitiveness, Jokowi insistently performed the warning pointing finger and “precision-grip” gesture, which Lempert (2011) masterfully analyzed in Obama’s speechmaking.
- ^{xxix}“*Zona nyaman*” is an idiom borrowed from the English “comfort zone”.
- ^{xxx}For a detailed overview of these structural reforms, see the letter of intent (dated October 31, 1997), in which the government of Indonesia described the policies to be implemented “in the context of its request for financial support from the IMF” <https://www.imf.org/external/np/loi/103197.htm>. Between 1997 and 2000, the Indonesian government “was required to sign no fewer than 16 Letters of Intent” (Hadiz & Robison, 2005: 225), detailing its commitment to implement the reform programs mandated by the IMF [Government of Indonesia, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000].
- ^{xxxi}Although not an explicit condition of the rescue package (Smith, 2008: 217) in Indonesia, the pursuit of administrative decentralization was positively seen as being aligned with the neoliberal agenda of delegating the state’s functions to other agencies (see Hadiz & Robison, 2004, 2005).
- ^{xxxii}Formulated in the early 1990s (World Bank, 1993), this market-centered paradigm of good governance entails “creating an effective political framework conducive to private economic action: stable regimes, the rule of law, and efficient state administration” (Hirst, 2000: 14).
- ^{xxxiii}Interview with Pak Agustinus (a pseudonym), January 16, 2023.
- ^{xxxiv}The term the officer used was PKM (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat): a type of community service arranged in partnership with local Universities (and sometimes NGOs) and undertaken by students to disseminate knowledge and empower local communities.
- ^{xxxv}“The earliest and best known of these is the 4th century BCE Arthaśāstra, purportedly written by Kautilya, the main advisor and minister to the Mauryan Empire’s first ruler” (Druce, 2017: 10).
- ^{xxxvi}It should be noted that while the *mandala* pertains in particular to Tantric Buddhism, the Borobudur was built between the eighth and ninth centuries by the dynasty of the Sailendra, who practiced instead Mahayana Buddhism; see Esposito (2020) for a review of the debates on mandalic symbolism of the Borobudur.
- ^{xxxvii}The *mandala* imaginary was commonly used also by other Asian leaders like Nehru and Mao. For more contemporary applications of the *mandala* to Indonesia’s foreign and domestic politics, see Spruyt (2020).
- ^{xxxviii}My references to the *mandala* exclusively concern the use of its *shape* in postcolonial representations of a vertically encompassing state and should not be understood in relation to the political structure of precolonial states described by the above mentioned scholars. Indeed, as I detailed above the mandalic galactic polities of precolonial Southeast Asia were not centralized states, but “loosely definable geographical area(s) without fixed boundaries” (Wolters, [1982] 1999: 35) and networks of satellite formations organized around an exemplary center (Geertz, 1980).
- ^{xxxix}The monument was first conceived in 1955 and actually designed in 1961 by Soedarsono who developed a sketch drawn by Sukarno himself (Leclerc, 1993). It was, however, open to the public only in 1975 (Nas, 1993).
- ^{xl}I am indebted to one anonymous reviewer for helping me flesh out this point on (in-)visibility and (im-)mobility.
- ^{xli}Interview with Pak Daud, January 14, 2023.

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