

Erasing the past, redesigning the nation: toponymic change, heritage signage, and contested memory in Indonesian public space

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ABSTRACT

Background: Public space has increasingly become a strategic arena where historical narratives, cultural identities, and political authority are negotiated through spatial symbols, commemorative practices, and heritage representation. **Objective:** This study investigates how toponymic change and heritage signage participate in the production, reinterpretation, and contestation of collective memory within Indonesian public space. **Method:** This study employs a qualitative corpus-based design integrating critical toponymy, multimodal heritage signage analysis, and memory politics, drawing on official naming documents, heritage signage materials, visual identity artefacts, policy texts, and contextual reports. **Results:** Findings indicate that commemorative renaming primarily functions as a mechanism for re-inscribing nationally preferred historical narratives into everyday spatial environments. Heritage signage further reinforces these narratives through multimodal combinations of language, visual symbolism, institutional branding, and spatial design that shape public interpretation of the past. **Implication:** At the same time, memory is not simply preserved or erased; rather, public space emerges as a site where historical meanings are selectively amplified, reinterpreted, and negotiated across competing scales of identity and heritage. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in integrating critical toponymy, multimodal heritage signage, and memory politics into a unified analytical framework that explains how spatial naming and visual heritage infrastructures jointly contribute to the redesign of national historical consciousness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Across contemporary societies, public space has become a strategic arena where states, local governments, and social actors negotiate the meanings of history, identity, and belonging. Toponymic change, heritage signage, and commemorative redesign increasingly function not merely as administrative or aesthetic interventions but as mechanisms through which collective memory is reorganized and national narratives are materially embedded in everyday environments. In Indonesia, such processes have gained heightened visibility through initiatives including the renaming of public streets, the redesign of national symbolic spaces, and the incorporation of cultural heritage into urban visual infrastructures. These developments are occurring alongside broader transformations in the production and consumption of public space in post-Reformasi cities [1] and renewed efforts to inscribe national identity into spatial landscapes. International scholarship similarly demonstrates that modifications to names, monuments, and

commemorative markers frequently reflect struggles over historical representation and political legitimacy [2], [3], [4]. Rather than functioning as neutral markers of location, place names and heritage signs increasingly operate as symbolic technologies through which particular versions of the past are elevated, revised, or marginalized. Consequently, understanding how memory is reconfigured through public space has become a critical analytical concern for heritage, memory, and spatial studies.

Recent scholarship has generated substantial insights into the relationships among place naming, heritage representation, and collective memory. Research on historical geographies of naming has demonstrated how toponyms function as instruments of political authority and cultural ordering [5], while studies of linguistic landscapes reveal how public signs communicate identity, power, and cultural belonging [6], [7]. Within heritage studies, scholars have examined contested monuments, commemorative spaces, and memory conflicts in diverse contexts, including colonial legacies, urban regeneration projects, and national identity formation [8], [9], [10]. Indonesian scholarship has likewise explored cultural memory in heritage institutions [11], the reconstruction of socio-cultural narratives through toponymy [12], and the symbolic role of naming practices in shaping national and cultural identities [13], [14]. Nevertheless, existing studies tend to examine toponymy, heritage signage, and memory politics as separate analytical domains. Limited attention has been devoted to how these elements operate together as interconnected mechanisms through which public space becomes a site of memory negotiation, historical erasure, and symbolic nation-building. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where spatial renaming and heritage visualization increasingly intersect within broader projects of national representation.

Addressing this gap, this study investigates how toponymic change and heritage signage participate in the construction, revision, and contestation of collective memory in Indonesian public space. Specifically, this study asks three interrelated questions. First, how are historical narratives rearticulated through the renaming of public places and spatial landmarks? Second, how do heritage signs and visual markers contribute to the selective representation of cultural and national identities? Third, what forms of memory inclusion, exclusion, or reinterpretation emerge from these spatial practices? These questions are informed by growing scholarly interest in de-commemoration, memoricide, and the politics of remembering and forgetting [15], [16]. Rather than treating names and signs as passive communicative elements, this study conceptualizes them as active components of memory governance that shape public understandings of the past. By integrating perspectives from critical toponymy, linguistic landscape studies, heritage studies, and memory studies, this study seeks to explain how symbolic interventions in public space mediate relationships between history, identity, and political authority.

This study advances the argument that toponymic change and heritage signage should be understood as mutually reinforcing practices through which national narratives are spatially institutionalized while alternative memories may be displaced, muted, or reinterpreted. This argument does not assume a uniform process of historical erasure; rather, it recognizes that public space often accommodates multiple and competing memory claims simultaneously. As studies of contested heritage and commemorative landscapes suggest, spatial interventions rarely eliminate historical meanings altogether but instead reorganize their visibility, legitimacy, and interpretive authority [17], [18]. From this perspective, renaming and heritage visualization are not simply acts of representation but forms of memory politics that shape how societies encounter the past in everyday life. By examining these dynamics within Indonesia, this study contributes to broader debates concerning contested heritage, public memory, and national identity formation, while offering a framework for understanding how spatial symbols participate in the ongoing redesign of collective historical consciousness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Place names

Place names are increasingly understood as political and cultural artifacts rather than neutral geographical labels. Early scholarship on critical toponymy conceptualized naming practices as instruments through which states, institutions, and communities impose particular understandings of territory, history, and identity. Recent studies extend this perspective by emphasizing the role of place names in constructing national narratives, reproducing symbolic power, and negotiating cultural belonging [5], [19]. Indonesian studies similarly demonstrate that toponyms encode socio-cultural values, historical memories, and ideological aspirations [13], [12], [14]. However, scholars differ in emphasis. Some view naming as a mechanism of territorial governance, while others interpret it as a dynamic process of cultural representation and identity-making. Collectively, this literature positions toponymy as an arena where historical narratives and political projects become materially embedded within everyday spatial environments.

Existing research identifies several dimensions through which toponymic practices operate. First, names function as commemorative devices that elevate selected historical actors, events, or cultural traditions while rendering others less visible [5]. Second, they perform identity work by linking places to ethnic,

national, religious, or cultural imaginaries [19], [13]. Third, naming practices contribute to spatial governance by institutionalizing particular interpretations of territory and belonging. Recent studies in Indonesia further reveal how naming can reconstruct socio-cultural narratives and connect urban development projects with cultural heritage agendas [12], [14]. Yet most analyses focus primarily on names themselves, paying less attention to how naming interacts with visual infrastructures such as heritage signs, plaques, directional systems, and commemorative markers. This limitation suggests the need for a broader perspective that situates toponymy within multimodal public landscapes.

2.2. Parallel developments

Parallel developments in linguistic landscape and heritage studies have highlighted the significance of signage as a medium through which identities and historical meanings are communicated in public space. Linguistic landscape scholarship initially focused on the visibility of languages in urban environments, but contemporary research increasingly examines signs as multimodal assemblages involving text, imagery, typography, spatial arrangement, and cultural symbolism [6], [7], [20]. Heritage scholarship similarly emphasizes that signs, trails, digital interfaces, and interpretive installations actively shape how the past is encountered and understood [9], [17]. While some scholars conceptualize signage primarily as a communicative resource, others regard it as a heritage technology that authorizes specific historical narratives. This shift expands analysis beyond language visibility toward questions of representation, authority, and cultural legitimacy.

Recent literature identifies several interconnected dimensions of heritage signage. One dimension concerns representation, referring to how visual and textual elements selectively communicate cultural values and historical meanings [7], [6]. Another involves spatial mediation, whereby signs guide movement, shape interpretation, and structure encounters with heritage sites [17]. A third dimension relates to visual governance through design choices such as colour schemes, iconography, typography, logos, and spatial layout, which contribute to the production of institutional authority and collective identity [21], [22], [23]. Emerging scholarship further demonstrates that heritage signs increasingly operate across physical and digital environments, creating layered forms of interpretation and remembrance [9]. Nevertheless, limited research examines how heritage signage interacts with changing place names to reconfigure historical narratives within public space.

2.3. The relationship between space, identity, and history

The relationship between space, identity, and history is most comprehensively addressed within collective memory studies. Memory scholars argue that remembrance is not merely an individual cognitive process but a socially organized practice embedded within institutions, symbols, and material environments. Recent debates focus on contested heritage, de-commemoration, memoricide, and the selective management of historical narratives [15], [16]. Studies of monuments, museums, urban heritage projects, and commemorative spaces demonstrate that public memory frequently involves competing interpretations of the past rather than stable consensus [2], [11], [3]. Research across different national contexts further shows that memory politics often emerges through struggles over colonial legacies, national identity, and historical recognition [8], [4], [10]. Consequently, public space constitutes a crucial site where remembering and forgetting are continuously negotiated.

Contemporary scholarship identifies three central dimensions of memory politics. The first concerns selection, referring to decisions regarding which histories, actors, and cultural traditions are publicly commemorated and which are marginalized [15], [16]. The second involves contestation, whereby different groups compete to define legitimate interpretations of the past [2], [18]. The third relates to resignification, through which existing symbols, places, and heritage elements acquire new meanings under changing political and cultural conditions [10], [4]. Although these dimensions have been extensively explored in studies of monuments, museums, and heritage sites, less attention has been devoted to the combined operation of place names and heritage signage as interconnected infrastructures of memory. This study addresses this gap by integrating critical toponymy, multimodal heritage signage, and memory politics into a unified analytical framework for examining how Indonesian public spaces become arenas of historical re-inscription, symbolic redesign, and contested remembrance.

3. METHOD

This study examines how toponymic change, heritage signage, and public memory are articulated through contemporary Indonesian public spaces. The unit of analysis consists of publicly accessible textual and visual documents related to place renaming, heritage interpretation, and symbolic spatial redesign. The corpus contains official regulations, governmental announcements, institutional publications, visual identity documents, heritage signage materials, and related contextual reports. These materials were selected because they constitute authoritative representations of spatial naming and memory governance. Rather than focusing

on individual perceptions, this study investigates publicly circulated symbolic artefacts through which historical narratives are institutionalized and communicated. Table 1 summarizes the composition of the dataset used in this research.

Table 1. Composition of dataset

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Number	Characteristics
PR-01– PR-05	Renaming documents	Provincial government regulations and announcements	Jakarta	2022– 2025	5	Official toponymic changes
HS-01– HS-04	Heritage signage materials	Heritage institutions and cultural agencies	Yogyakarta	2022– 2025	4	Interpretive signs and heritage information
VI-01– VI-03	Visual identity documents	National development and branding institutions	IKN	2022– 2025	3	Spatial branding and symbolic redesign
CT-01– CT-03	News and institutional reports	Public media and official releases	National	2022– 2025	3	Contextual information
CX-01– CX-05	Supporting policy and heritage documents	Government and cultural archives	National	2021– 2025	5	Historical and policy context

This study adopts a qualitative corpus-based design integrating critical toponymy, multimodal heritage analysis, and memory studies. Such an approach is appropriate because naming practices and heritage signs function simultaneously as linguistic, visual, and political phenomena. Recent scholarship demonstrates that place names shape territorial narratives [5], while heritage signs mediate cultural representation through multimodal forms [7], [6]. Memory studies further emphasize that public space constitutes a key arena in which historical narratives are negotiated and institutionalized [15], [16]. Accordingly, this study treats names, signs, and spatial symbols as interconnected elements of a broader memory infrastructure rather than as isolated communicative artefacts.

Information was derived from three categories of sources. Primary data comprise official naming documents, heritage signage texts, visual identity materials, and publicly available images issued by governmental and heritage institutions. Secondary data consist of institutional reports, public communication materials, and news coverage explaining the implementation and reception of spatial interventions. Contextual data include policy documents, heritage descriptions, and supporting materials that provide historical background. The inclusion of multiple source categories enables triangulation between formal naming practices, visual representation strategies, and broader narratives of national identity. This strategy enhances interpretive validity while maintaining consistency across different forms of textual and visual evidence.

Data collection followed a structured corpus-building procedure. First, official institutions associated with public naming, heritage management, and spatial branding were identified. Second, keyword-based searches were conducted using terms such as “street renaming,” “heritage signage,” “public space identity,” “toponymy,” and “national symbolism.” Third, documents were screened according to predefined inclusion criteria: public accessibility, institutional authenticity, relevance to spatial naming or heritage representation, and availability of publication metadata. Duplicate records were removed through manual verification. Each document was subsequently assigned a unique identification code and catalogued using metadata fields including title, date, source, location, document type, URL, and contextual description. Visual materials were additionally documented through variables such as colour, layout, visual actors, symbols, framing, and screenshot references.

Data analysis proceeded through five sequential stages summarized in Figure 2. The first stage involved metadata organization and corpus classification. The second stage applied critical toponymic analysis to identify commemorative references, identity constructions, and symbolic territorial claims. The third stage employed multimodal heritage signage analysis focusing on textual content, visual symbolism, typography, spatial arrangement, and institutional markers. The fourth stage utilized memory politics analysis to examine patterns of remembrance, omission, contestation, and historical reinterpretation. Finally, findings were synthesized into three analytical outputs: Result A (toponymic re-inscription), Result B (heritage signage and visual redesign), and Result C (contested memory and selective commemoration). This analytical sequence enables systematic examination of how public space functions as a medium through which historical narratives are reconfigured and national identities are spatially articulated.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Re-inscribing national narratives through toponymic transformation

The reconfiguration of public naming practices reveals that commemorative and identity-oriented considerations dominate contemporary spatial transformations. References associated with national heroes, anti-colonial narratives, and territorial integration account for the largest proportion of coded instances, indicating that naming interventions extend beyond administrative functionality. Patterns observed across official renaming documents, visual identity materials, and contextual policy texts suggest a recurring tendency to privilege nationally recognizable historical references while simultaneously embedding local cultural markers. Although administrative rationalisation remains present, it appears secondary to symbolic objectives. Such distributions indicate that place names are frequently mobilised as cultural and political resources through which public space is connected to broader narratives of nationhood, historical continuity, and collective belonging.

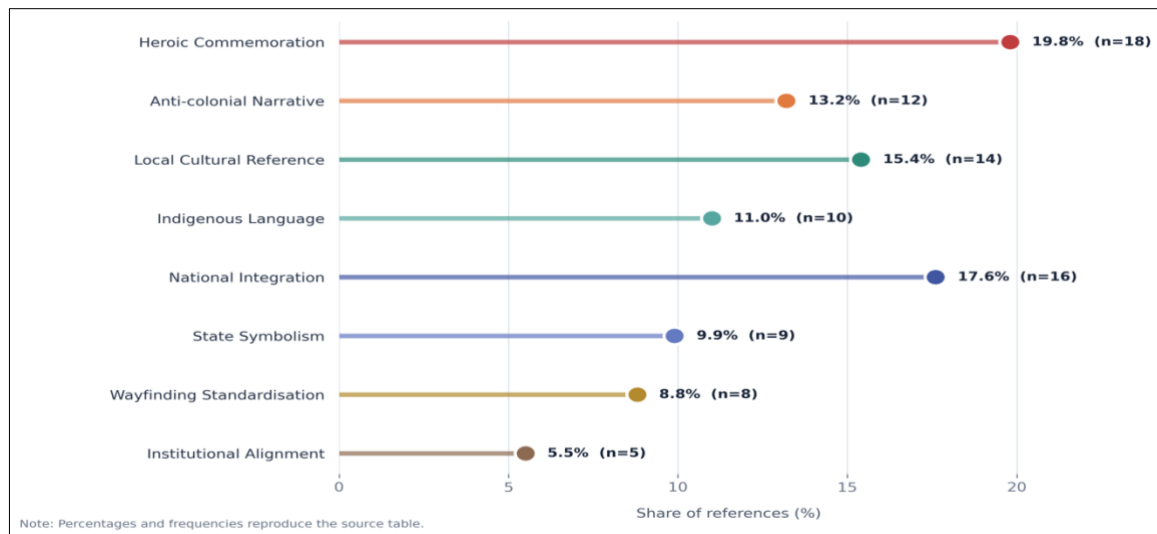


Figure 1. Toponymic re-inscription patterns

Table 2. Toponymic re-inscription patterns in Indonesian public space

Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	% of References	Spatial Context	Representative Example	Data Codes
Heroic Commemoration	Use of national figures as place names	18	19.8	Streets, boulevards	Historical figures associated with independence	PR-01, PR-02, PR-04
Anti-colonial Narrative	Replacement of colonial references	12	13.2	Urban corridors	Removal of colonial-era nomenclature	PR-01, CT-01
Local Cultural Reference	Incorporation of regional cultural symbols	14	15.4	Heritage districts	References to local traditions and cultural icons	HS-01, HS-02, CX-03
Indigenous Language	Use of local linguistic forms	10	11.0	Public signage and pathways	Indigenous lexical elements	HS-03, CX-04
National Integration	References to unity and nationhood	16	17.6	National-scale projects	Integrative naming schemes	VI-01, VI-02
State Symbolism	References to state institutions and symbols	9	9.9	Monumental public spaces	National symbols embedded in naming	VI-03, CT-02
Wayfinding Standardisation	Functional renaming for navigation	8	8.8	Transport and mobility spaces	Simplified place identification	PR-03, CX-02
Institutional Alignment	Harmonisation with official planning frameworks	5	5.5	Redeveloped urban zones	Alignment with planning narratives	CT-03, CX-05

A closer examination of the coding structure demonstrates several dominant tendencies. Heroic commemoration emerges as the most frequent category, followed by national integration and local cultural references. These categories collectively represent more than half of all coded references, suggesting that memory-oriented naming practices outweigh purely technical considerations. References linked to colonial removal also appear prominently, indicating sustained efforts to redefine historical visibility within urban landscapes. By contrast, categories associated with navigation and institutional alignment display lower frequencies and narrower spatial distribution. The matrix further shows that heritage-oriented references frequently coexist with national symbolism rather than operating independently. Consequently, naming practices appear to function through a layered strategy in which local cultural narratives are incorporated into broader state-centred frameworks of historical representation and territorial identity.

These patterns support growing scholarship that conceptualises toponymy as a mechanism of symbolic governance rather than a neutral geographical practice. Williamson (2023) [5] argues that place names institutionalise particular interpretations of history, while Demaj (2022) [19] demonstrates how spatial naming contributes to the construction of national identity within public landscapes. Similar dynamics are evident in studies of Indonesian naming practices, where cultural narratives and political aspirations become embedded in spatial vocabularies [13], [12], [14]. Viewed through the lens of memory studies, the prominence of heroic and anti-colonial references suggests processes of selective remembrance in which specific historical trajectories receive enhanced visibility while alternative histories become less prominent [15], [16]. Rather than simply identifying locations, public names operate as enduring memory devices that continuously reproduce preferred narratives of the nation within everyday spatial experience.

4.2. Visualising heritage through signage and spatial design

Public representations of heritage are not communicated solely through names but through complex combinations of text, images, colours, symbols, and institutional design systems. The coding results indicate that historical narrativisation, cultural symbolisation, and national visual identity constitute the most dominant elements within the corpus. Together, these categories account for more than half of all coded references, suggesting that heritage signage functions simultaneously as an educational, cultural, and political medium. While linguistic visibility remains significant, visual-symbolic resources appear more prominent in shaping interpretive experiences. The distribution further reveals a recurring integration of heritage representation with state-centred branding strategies. Consequently, heritage communication emerges not merely as the preservation of historical information but as an active process of shaping how the past is encountered within contemporary public space.

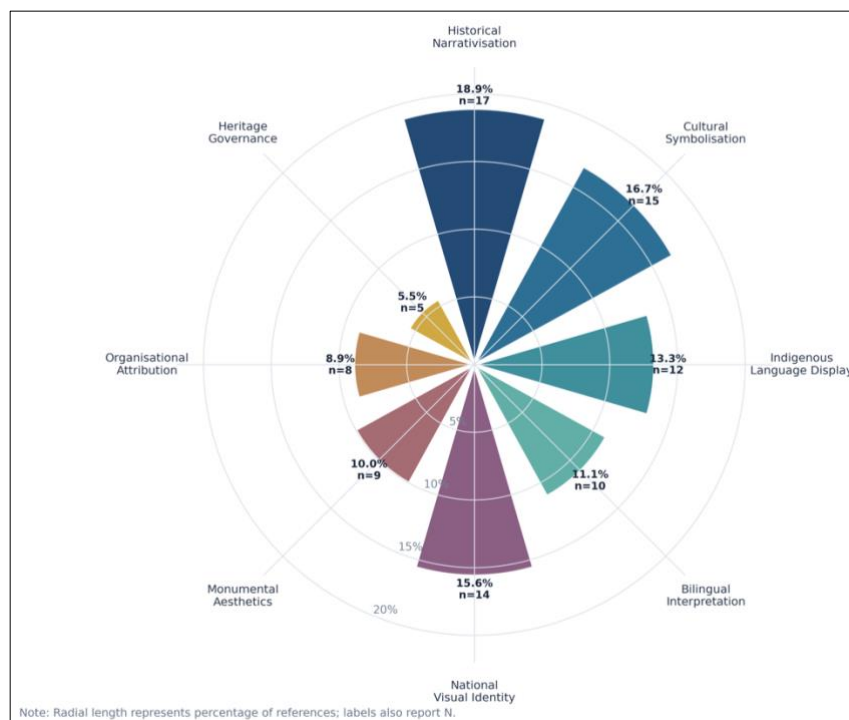


Figure 2. Multimodal heritage signage and visual identity

Table 3. Multimodal heritage signage and visual identity patterns

Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	% of References	Visual Element	Representative Example	Data Codes
Historical Narrativisation	Explicit reference to historical events, places, or traditions	17	18.9	Interpretive text panels	Heritage explanation boards	HS-01, HS-02
Cultural Symbolisation	Use of cultural motifs and local iconography	15	16.7	Visual symbols and ornaments	Regional motifs and decorative elements	HS-02, HS-03, VI-01
Indigenous Language Display	Presence of local language expressions	12	13.3	Typography and signage text	Local-language naming systems	HS-03, HS-04
Bilingual Interpretation	Combination of national and local language	10	11.1	Multilingual text layout	Heritage explanatory panels	HS-01, HS-04
National Visual Identity	Integration of state symbols and official design systems	14	15.6	Logos, colour systems	National development branding	VI-01, VI-02, VI-03
Monumental Aesthetics	Visual emphasis on prestige and national symbolism	9	10.0	Monumental layouts and imagery	National public-space projects	VI-02, CT-02
Organisational Attribution	Prominent display of institutional identity	8	8.9	Logos and official signatures	Governmental heritage signage	HS-01, VI-03
Heritage Governance	References to preservation and management frameworks	5	5.5	Regulatory information	Heritage management notices	CX-03, CX-04

Several dominant patterns become visible when textual and visual dimensions are examined together. Historical narratives are frequently accompanied by cultural motifs, local iconography, and institutional markers that reinforce specific interpretations of place. Indigenous-language visibility is consistently associated with representations of authenticity and locality, while bilingual configurations often appear in sites designed for broader public engagement. National visual identity elements are also strongly present, particularly within recently developed public spaces and large-scale symbolic projects. Such combinations indicate that heritage communication operates through layered semiotic structures rather than isolated textual messages. Heritage signs therefore function not only as information carriers but also as visual frameworks that guide interpretation, shape visitor attention, and legitimise particular understandings of history and identity.

This configuration aligns with contemporary linguistic landscape and heritage scholarship. Studies by Purnawati et al. (2024) [7], Benu et al. (2025) [6], and Aini (2026) [20] demonstrate that public signs communicate identity through the interaction of language, design, and spatial positioning rather than through textual content alone. Heritage scholars similarly argue that interpretive infrastructures actively shape historical understanding by authorising certain narratives and modes of remembrance [17], [9]. From this perspective, visual identity systems and heritage signage function as complementary mechanisms of symbolic governance. Their coexistence within public space suggests that memory is not only narrated but also visually orchestrated. Rather than simply preserving cultural heritage, signage systems contribute to the ongoing redesign of historical meaning through carefully structured multimodal representations.

4.3. Negotiating remembering and forgetting in public space

Collective memory emerges within the corpus not as a fixed repository of historical facts but as an ongoing process of selection, reinterpretation, and negotiation. References associated with heroic elevation and cultural canonisation dominate the dataset, indicating a strong tendency toward the institutional reinforcement of particular historical narratives. Simultaneously, categories linked to colonial reframing and

national rearticulation appear with substantial frequency, suggesting that memory work frequently involves reinterpretation rather than simple preservation. Contestation-related categories remain visible across multiple document types, revealing that public memory is neither fully unified nor entirely fragmented. Instead, public space appears to accommodate multiple temporal layers in which remembrance, reinterpretation, and symbolic negotiation coexist within a shared commemorative landscape.

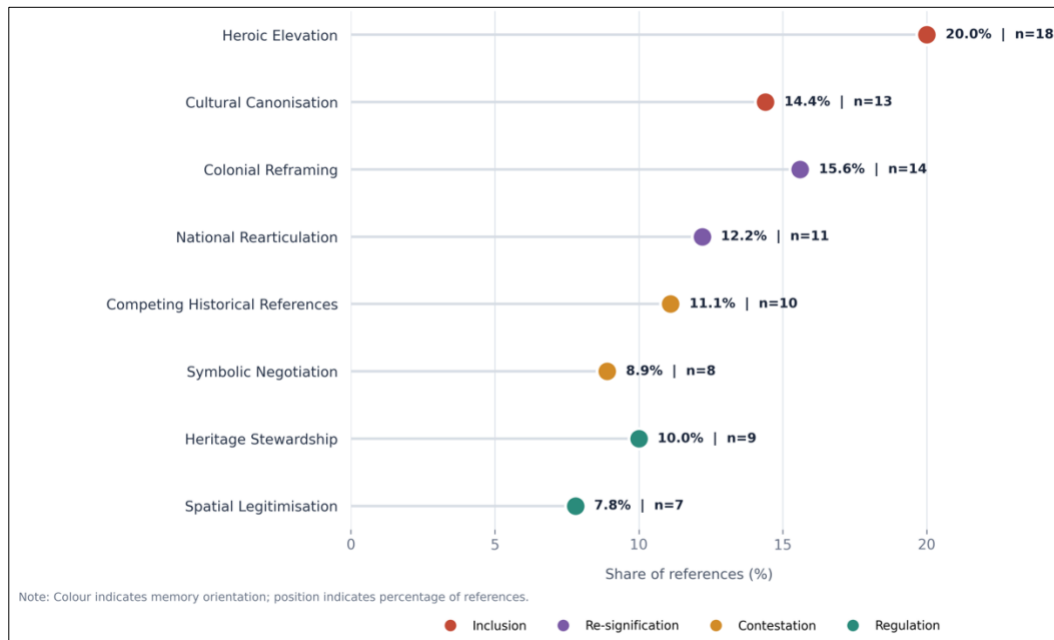


Figure 3. Memory politics and contested remembrance

Table 4. Memory politics and contested remembrance across the corpus

Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Freq.	% of References	Memory Orientation	Representative Example	Data Codes
Heroic Elevation	Prioritisation of nationally recognised figures	18	20.0	Inclusion	Hero-centred naming and symbolism	PR-01, PR-02, VI-02
Cultural Canonisation	Institutional recognition of specific traditions	13	14.4	Inclusion	Heritage narratives and symbolic motifs	HS-01, HS-03
Colonial Reframing	Repositioning colonial references	14	15.6	Re-signification	Renaming and reinterpetive narratives	PR-01, CT-01
National Rearticulation	Recasting local histories within national frameworks	11	12.2	Re-signification	National identity integration	VI-01, CX-02
Competing Historical References	Coexistence of multiple historical claims	10	11.1	Contestation	Divergent commemorative narratives	HS-02, CT-03
Symbolic Negotiation	Multiple identity claims in one spatial setting	8	8.9	Contestation	National-local symbolic overlap	HS-03, VI-03
Heritage Stewardship	Formal management of historical narratives	9	10.0	Regulation	Institutional heritage communication	CX-03, CX-04
Spatial Legitimation	State endorsement of commemorative meanings	7	7.8	Regulation	Official public-space narratives	VI-02, CT-02

The coding structure indicates that memory politics operates through a combination of inclusion and transformation. Heroic figures, nationally recognised events, and culturally sanctioned traditions receive the highest levels of visibility, while reinterpetive strategies frequently reposition earlier historical references within contemporary national frameworks. Contestation is most visible where local identities intersect with

broader state narratives or where multiple historical claims occupy the same symbolic space. Institutional governance further shapes these dynamics by defining acceptable forms of representation and by stabilising selected interpretations through official communication channels. The resulting pattern is therefore neither complete historical continuity nor total historical replacement. Instead, memory is reorganised through processes that selectively amplify, reinterpret, and spatially redistribute historical meanings.

These findings resonate strongly with contemporary debates in memory studies and contested heritage research. Adams (2023) [15] and Webster (2023) [16] argue that remembering and forgetting are mutually constitutive processes through which societies continuously renegotiate their relationship with the past. Studies of contested monuments, heritage sites, and commemorative landscapes similarly demonstrate that historical meanings are frequently reshaped through symbolic interventions rather than erased outright [2], [3], [18]. Research on re-signification and decolonisation further shows that public space often becomes a medium through which historical narratives are selectively recalibrated under changing political conditions [4], [10]. Viewed through this lens, naming practices and heritage signage constitute interconnected infrastructures of memory governance that continuously redefine how nations encounter, interpret, and legitimise their past.

5. DISCUSSION

The prominence of commemorative renaming within the corpus suggests that contemporary place-naming practices perform functions extending well beyond spatial identification. Public names operate as symbolic infrastructures through which historical narratives are normalized, circulated, and reproduced within everyday life. The predominance of heroic references, anti-colonial narratives, and integrative national symbolism indicates that naming interventions contribute to the consolidation of shared historical frameworks. From one perspective, such processes may strengthen collective orientation by providing recognizable symbolic anchors linking space, history, and citizenship. Similar observations have been reported in studies of national identity construction through public landscapes, where naming practices facilitate the institutionalization of collective belonging [19], [24]. However, this symbolic function also contains potential dysfunctions. The selective elevation of particular historical actors may reduce the visibility of alternative narratives, regional experiences, or marginalized memories. In this sense, naming practices simultaneously preserve memory and structure historical silence. This interpretation supports recent discussions of de-commemoration and memoricide, which emphasize that remembering inevitably involves processes of exclusion as well as inclusion [15], [16]. Consequently, the broader implication is not merely that names commemorate the past but that they actively participate in defining which versions of the past become publicly authoritative.

The underlying mechanisms behind this pattern appear to be rooted in the relationship between symbolic governance and nation-building. Place names possess unusual political durability because they are repeatedly encountered through everyday mobility, administrative communication, and spatial orientation. As a result, they offer institutions a relatively stable medium through which preferred historical narratives can be embedded within routine social practices. This observation resonates with Williamson's (2023) [5] argument that toponymy functions as an enduring technology of territorial ordering. At the same time, findings differ from interpretations that portray renaming primarily as a reaction to specific political transitions. Rather than reflecting only episodic political change, evidence suggests a broader process of narrative recalibration in which historical references are continuously aligned with contemporary identity projects. Indonesian studies on toponymic reconstruction similarly indicate that naming increasingly serves developmental, cultural, and symbolic objectives simultaneously [12], [14]. Therefore, the relationship identified here is not a simple causal chain between political power and naming decisions. Instead, naming practices appear to emerge from a deeper structural interaction between governance, territorial representation, and the ongoing production of national historical consciousness.

The patterns observed in heritage signage reveal a second implication concerning how historical meaning is communicated and legitimized. Heritage representation within the corpus relies not only on textual explanation but also on visual design, linguistic selection, iconographic symbolism, and institutional branding. Such multimodal configurations expand the communicative capacity of heritage infrastructures by transforming public space into an interpretive environment rather than a passive repository of historical information. This development carries important consequences. On one hand, multimodal heritage communication may enhance accessibility by enabling diverse audiences to engage with historical narratives through multiple sensory and semiotic channels. On the other hand, visual coherence and institutional standardization may also reinforce particular interpretive frameworks while limiting alternative readings. Similar tensions have been identified in studies of heritage trails, cultural districts, and augmented-reality heritage environments, where interpretation often becomes intertwined with institutional authority [17], [9]. Accordingly, heritage signage should not be viewed merely as an informational supplement to heritage sites.

Instead, it functions as a powerful mediating mechanism through which cultural memory is organized, curated, and publicly stabilized.

Understanding why these multimodal configurations emerge requires attention to broader transformations in contemporary public communication. Heritage institutions increasingly operate within environments characterized by visual saturation, branding logics, and intensified competition for public attention. Under such conditions, textual descriptions alone may be insufficient for communicating cultural significance. Visual identity systems, symbolic motifs, and carefully structured design elements become necessary tools for producing interpretive coherence. This explanation is consistent with linguistic landscape scholarship demonstrating that public signs communicate meaning through the interaction of language, imagery, typography, and spatial arrangement rather than through linguistic content alone [6], [7], [20]. Nevertheless, findings extend this literature by suggesting that heritage communication is increasingly integrated into wider projects of symbolic nation-building. Rather than operating independently, local cultural representations are frequently embedded within nationally recognizable visual frameworks. This relationship supports observations by Lim et al. (2025) [21] regarding the growing role of visual identity systems in public-space governance. Consequently, heritage signage appears to function simultaneously as cultural interpretation, institutional communication, and symbolic territorial representation.

The broader implications of memory contestation are particularly significant because they reveal how public space accommodates competing temporalities rather than a single historical narrative. Findings indicate that remembrance, reinterpretation, and symbolic negotiation coexist across multiple forms of public representation. Such coexistence challenges simplistic assumptions that spatial redesign necessarily results in complete historical erasure [25]. Instead, historical references often persist through processes of re-signification in which older meanings are repositioned within new interpretive frameworks. This dynamic has important consequences for understanding contested heritage. Rather than viewing public memory as a binary struggle between preservation and deletion, evidence suggests a more complex process involving selective amplification, strategic reinterpretation, and negotiated visibility. Similar conclusions have emerged from studies of monuments, museums, and contested heritage landscapes, where historical meanings are continually revised without necessarily disappearing altogether [2], [3], [18]. Accordingly, the central issue is not whether memory survives spatial transformation but how different memories acquire unequal levels of visibility, legitimacy, and institutional recognition within evolving public landscapes.

The structural foundations of this process can be understood through contemporary theories of memory politics. Collective memory is not maintained through spontaneous social consensus but through ongoing interactions among institutions, cultural actors, and symbolic infrastructures. Public spaces provide a particularly important arena because they materialize historical narratives in durable and highly visible forms. Findings suggest that contestation emerges when multiple actors seek to define legitimate interpretations of history, while institutional governance attempts to stabilize those interpretations through official naming systems, heritage communication, and symbolic design. This explanation aligns with scholarship on decolonization, contested heritage, and historical re-signification, which emphasizes that memory politics often involves the reordering rather than the elimination of historical meanings [4], [10]. At the same time, findings complicate interpretations that portray memory governance as entirely top-down. The coexistence of national, local, and cultural references indicates that multiple historical scales remain active within public representation. Therefore, memory politics in Indonesian public space is best understood as a dynamic process of negotiation through which nations continuously redesign historical visibility while simultaneously inheriting traces of earlier commemorative regimes.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that toponymic change, heritage signage, and public memory are not isolated phenomena but interconnected mechanisms through which historical narratives are spatially produced, communicated, and negotiated. The findings indicate that contemporary transformations of Indonesian public space involve a simultaneous process of commemorative renaming, visual heritage representation, and memory governance. Rather than functioning merely as administrative tools or informational devices, place names and heritage signs operate as symbolic infrastructures that shape the visibility of particular historical narratives while repositioning others within new interpretive frameworks. The principal contribution of this study lies in integrating critical toponymy, multimodal heritage signage analysis, and memory politics into a unified analytical framework. By connecting naming practices, visual representation, and collective remembrance, this study extends existing scholarship beyond single-dimensional analyses and offers a more comprehensive perspective on how nations redesign historical consciousness through everyday spatial environments.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. First, this study relies primarily on publicly available textual and visual materials, which limits the ability to examine how different social groups

interpret, negotiate, or resist official representations of history. Second, the corpus focuses on institutional and publicly visible artefacts, leaving less visible forms of memory-making outside the analytical scope. Third, while this study identifies patterns of symbolic representation and memory governance, it does not assess their long-term social effects on public historical understanding. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating interviews, ethnographic observation, audience reception studies, and comparative analyses across different Indonesian regions or international contexts. Such approaches would provide deeper insight into how spatial symbols are experienced, contested, and reinterpreted by diverse communities, thereby further advancing scholarship on contested heritage, memory politics, and public space.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Eka Fitri Hastuti: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible naming documents, heritage signage materials, and policy texts.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible naming documents, heritage signage materials, and policy texts, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The corpus of documents analyzed in this study are publicly accessible and available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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