

**“Deconstructing Food Security:  
A WPR Analysis of Indonesia's Food Estate Policies –  
The Case of Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate”**

Master of Applied Anthropology and Development (Advanced)

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*I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in this text, this thesis represents my own original work.*

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Rina', written in a cursive style.

*Date: November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024*

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Signed:

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## ABSTRACT

*The 2007–2008 global surge in food prices marked a critical shift in Indonesia's food policy, moving from reliance on food imports to a strategy prioritizing domestic production. Under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, policies were formulated to strengthen food security through large-scale agricultural projects known as food estates (lumbung pangan). The flagship program of this initiative, the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) in Merauke, Papua, was launched in 2010, allocating concessions to 44 corporations across 2.15 million hectares for timber, sugarcane, oil palm, and food crop plantations. However, despite being promoted as a solution to food security challenges, MIFEE led to environmental degradation and adverse impacts on local communities. The project itself has been deemed a failure marked by unsuccessful crop yields, resulting in its abandonment, with portions of the land acquired by corporations.*

*Despite MIFEE's shortcomings, the food estate model has persisted across successive administrations. During President Joko Widodo's final term, a new food estate project called "Food Estate Merauke" was announced, targeting a different area in Merauke and underscoring Papua's continued appeal for such initiatives. This project is now set to continue under newly-elected President Prabowo Subianto. Against this backdrop, this thesis argues that MIFEE reveals critical contradictions within the food estate approach. While the government successfully framed the national drive for self-sufficiency as "kedaulatan pangan" (food sovereignty), this initiative often compromises local rights and needs. MIFEE thus serves as a lens to understand similar initiatives, exposing how national agendas can overshadow and marginalize local priorities. This thesis applies Carol Bacchi's*

*“What’s the Problem Represented to Be?” (WPR) framework to analyze how Indonesian governments have constructed food security narratives, focusing on MIFEE. By framing food security as a deficit in national self-sufficiency, these narratives promote large-scale agricultural development as the solution, equating food security with national pride and sovereignty. This research serves as a benchmark for examining how the new government justifies such initiatives, downplaying MIFEE’s adverse impacts to garner public and political support for expanding food estates in Papua.*

*Advocating for food sovereignty policies that respect local knowledge and prioritize sustainable practices, this thesis challenges the prevailing discourse and envisions a food system grounded in local empowerment and ecological sustainability. It provides a foundational study for understanding how political and economic interests in food estate programs have consistently overlooked the needs of local communities, advancing national interests and the "greater good" at the expense of social justice.*

**Keywords:** *MIFEE, food estate, food security, Indonesia food policy, Indigenous people, , Carol Bacchi’s WPR Approach, discourse analysis, sustainability.*

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The global concern over food security, amplified by the 2007–2008 food and energy price crisis (Candel 2014; Perez-Escamilla, et. al 2017), had an impact on Indonesia's policies under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY)'s administration (McCarthy, Vel & Afiff 2012). Framed through the lens of food sovereignty, SBY's government prioritized national self-sufficiency, viewing food security not only as a domestic necessity but also as a global responsibility (Neilson & Wright 2016). This vision was realized through large-scale agricultural projects known as food estates, marking a significant policy shift aimed at enhancing Indonesia's role in global food production while securing its own food sovereignty (Ito et. al 2014). This thesis, *Deconstructing Food Security: A WPR Analysis of Indonesia's Food Estate Policies – The Case of Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate*, uses Carol Bacchi's *What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) framework (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Goodwin 2018) to analyse how the Indonesian government has framed food security through the food estate in Merauke, Papua, and its broader food estate policy. It also explores the complex social, environmental, and political impacts on Indigenous communities in Papua, questioning whether these large-scale agricultural projects truly enhance food security or paradoxically undermine local food sovereignty and sustainability. This thesis contributes important insights to the literature on Indonesia's food estate model, revealing how national food security policies, shaped by political and economic agendas, often sideline local rights and ecological needs. Through

an analysis of the MIFEE using Bacchi's WPR framework, it underscores the need for policies that genuinely support local empowerment and sustainable practices.

### ***The Rise of Food Security Concerns in Indonesia***

Food security has become a critical global concern, particularly after the 2007–2008 world food price crisis (Bastian & Coveney 2013, p. 162; McCarthy & Obidzinski 2017, p. 344). The 2008 World Development Report further emphasized the importance of greater investment in agriculture, especially in developing countries, as a key measure to ensure food security. Despite decades of efforts to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, food insecurity remains a major challenge. It is now evident that food security is closely connected to global environmental changes and energy markets, while the agricultural policy landscape is evolving and becoming more globalized (Candel 2014, p. 585). As a result, the concept of food security has gained significant attention in academia and policy discussions. The definition of food security has evolved over time. At the 1974 World Food Summit, the United Nations (UN) primarily focused on food supply, emphasizing availability and price stability. In 1983, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expanded the concept to include ensuring access to food for vulnerable populations. By the 1996 World Food Summit, the definition further evolved to encompass food security at both individual and household levels (Bastian & Coveney 2013, pp. 162-163). Today, food security is understood to have four essential dimensions: the availability of food through production and supply, access at the household level, the proper utilization of nutrients by the body, and the stability of these factors over time (World Bank 2023; FAO 2009).

The call to action to strengthen food security during times of crisis resonated during President SBY administration (2004-2014), leading to a notable policy shift. In 2005, the government sought to enhance 'food security' mainly through imports, which positioned Indonesia as the fourth-largest rice importer globally (McCarthy, Vel & Afiff 2012, p. 529). However, by 2007, soaring food prices prompted a change in strategy. It began focusing on boosting rice production, either by intensifying cultivation in the densely populated and land-scarce Java or utilizing 'idle' lands in the Outer Islands for industrial agriculture (Ito, Rachman & Savitri 2014, p. 10). As a result, the concept of food security increasingly centred on bolstering food supply (McCarthy & Obidzinski 2017, p. 345). In 2008, the government identified around 87 million people out of Indonesia's 240 million population (36%) as experiencing food insecurity (Indonesia's National Food Security Agency – *Dewan Ketahanan Pangan*, DKP). The government sought to enhance food security by increasing domestic food production, which was framed through the discourse of food sovereignty. The focus was on ensuring national food availability, measured by whether a country produced more food than it consumed. From this perspective, national food self-sufficiency was seen as the key strategy for achieving food security (Neilson & Wright 2017, p. 132). President SBY prioritized food self-sufficiency, setting ambitious goals to achieve self-reliance in corn, soybeans, sugar, and beef, along with a target of generating a 10 million ton rice surplus by 2014 (*ibid*, 2017, p. 136).

The Minister of Agriculture Suswono stated that the effort to strengthen national food security was manifested in the food estate program (Zakaria 2011, p.2). The concept first emerged in the media in late 2009, introduced by Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Hatta Rajasa, as part of the government's broader efforts to promote large-scale

agricultural initiatives. The establishment of food estate became a national priority with the ambitious goal of achieving self-sufficiency while also positioning Indonesia as a global contributor to food security. This vision was encapsulated in the slogan "Feeding Indonesia, Feeding the World" (Chao 2022; Neilson & Wright 2017; Ito, Rachman & Savitri 2014; Ginting & Pye 2013). During SBY's administration, food estate programs were established in several regions, including Merauke, Papua (2010), Bulungan, North Kalimantan (2011), and Ketapang, West Kalimantan (2013) (Yuniarto 2023; McCarthy & Obidzinski 2017, pp. 348-349; McCarthy, Vel & Afiff 2012, p. 529). President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, (2014–2024) continued the food estate concept and initiated similar projects in various regions, including West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Maluku, and Papua (Presidential Regulation No. 3/2016). The Ministry of Agriculture (2022) also identified additional projects in North Sumatra and East Nusa Tenggara. With President-elect Prabowo Subianto (2024-2029), it is anticipated that the food estate development program will persist, particularly as part of Prabowo's Asta Cita program, which includes plans to establish new rice fields (Widi 2024). It is worth noting that while the term "food estate" emerged under SBY's administration, the idea of large-scale agricultural development dates back to the Suharto era (1966-1998), with the 'Mega Rice Program' or *Proyek Lahan Gambut (PLG)* in Central Kalimantan. According to Presidential Decree 82/1995 on Peatland Development for Food Crops in Central Kalimantan, the program aimed to convert 1 million hectares of peat swamp forest into agricultural land for food crops.

The global urgency surrounding food security significantly influenced the SBY administration's policies. By framing food security through the lens of food sovereignty,

Indonesia sought not only to achieve national self-sufficiency but also to contribute to global food stability. The Indonesian government seeks to contribute to global food stability to leverage its strategic position in East Asia, while enhancing its influence and economic competitiveness. Positioned as Southeast Asia's largest and most resource-rich country, Indonesia's role as a food security hub strengthens its standing in the ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA), aligns with sustainable development goals, and enables it to capitalize on economic opportunities from regional integration and trade expansion (The Appendix to Presidential Regulation No. 32/2011, pp. 3-8). This ambition took shape through the food estate program, a key policy mechanism aimed at boosting domestic food production and reducing dependence on imports. However, the implementation of food estates in various regions revealed the complexities and challenges inherent in large-scale agricultural projects, with the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) in Papua emerging as the flagship initiative. The following chapter explores the development of MIFEE, discussing its relevance in current policy discussions and the implications for Indonesia's ongoing food estate initiatives.

### ***Why Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) Matters***

The establishment of the food estate (lumbung pangan) in Papua served as a flagship project under President SBY's administration in its efforts to achieve food security. Known as the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE), the project was officially launched by the Ministry of Agriculture on August 11, 2010, in Kampung Sirapu, Kurik District, Merauke Regency, Papua. The Master Plan for Acceleration and Expansion of

Indonesian Economic Development 2011-2025 (Masterplan Percepatan dan Perluasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Indonesia-MP3EI) emphasized the importance of food security and endorsed the establishment of MIFEE as a key initiative to achieve this goal (Neilson & Wright 2017, p. 138), with both national and regional regulations backing the project. Originally, MIFEE aimed to develop food crops and biofuels across 1.28 million hectares of land (Ito, Rachman & Savitri 2014, pp. 5 & 14; AwasMIFEE 2012, p. 12; Zakaria 2011, pp. 10 & 84). As of May 2010, 36 companies were involved in developing the food estate, with a total area of 2.05 million hectares (Regional Investment Planning Agency, 2010). By August 2010, 44 corporations had received concessions totalling 2.15 million hectares. The land was allocated for various commodities: 44.1% for forestry (timber), 35.5% for sugarcane, 17.6% for oil palm, and 2.8% for food crop plantations (Regional Investment Coordination Board, 2010). This data shows that the total permitted land ended up being almost twice the originally planned size. The project impacted approximately 50,000 Malind people and other Indigenous communities, including the Muyu, Mandobo, Mappi, and Auyu, in Merauke (AwasMIFEE 2012, p. 5).

Now, fourteen years after its launch, MIFEE remains highly relevant in Indonesia's policy discussions on food security. MIFEE has become a symbol of success in large-scale agricultural development, which has motivated the Indonesian government to continue expanding food estate projects in other regions. In 2014, despite facing environmental concerns—such as the disruption of sensitive peatland areas, which increased the risk of forest fires (Arianto et al. 2015, p. 14)—and strong local resistance (Ito et al. 2014; Ginting & Pye 2013), newly elected President Jokowi, announced plans to establish Merauke as Indonesia's "rice bowl," aiming to expand the project's land allocation. This move

reinforced the government's commitment to the project and spurred the further expansion of food estate initiatives nationwide as part of a broader strategy to enhance food security (GRAIN 2015). The selection of Papua for the MIFEE project is also closely tied to ongoing issues that underscore the conflict between state-driven development and the rights of Indigenous Papuans, who continue to face displacement and environmental degradation. Papua faces four key challenges: the marginalization of indigenous people, the failure of development, contradictions between Papuan and Jakarta interpretations of political identity and history, and the state's accountability for past acts of violence against Papuans (Widjojo 2010). Additionally, Papua is often referred to as the "last frontier," viewed by the government as a region that can always serve developmental purposes, despite the significant social and environmental costs (WRI 2018).

MIFEE has sparked considerable debate. As one of the largest proposed plantation projects in the region, MIFEE is closely tied to the political ambitions of Merauke's Bupati, Johannes Gluba Gebze, who seeks to establish South Papua Province. This political agenda has led to intimidation and military involvement aimed at suppressing opposition (EIA & Telapak 2009, pp. 19-20). The implementation of MIFEE also faces significant challenges, particularly in aligning production targets with reality. Merauke is only capable of one planting season per year, and the region's infrastructure and human resources are not equipped to meet the project's demands, with a severe shortage of agricultural labour posing a major obstacle (Susanto 2008, p. 42). From the outset, academics have criticized MIFEE for neglecting the local context, stressing the need to adapt the project to the cultural practices of the Merauke community (Zakaria 2010; MAS 2010e). They warn that the current approach risks shifting agriculture towards corporate-controlled models,

potentially undermining food sovereignty and disproportionately benefiting investors over local farmers (MAS 2010e, p. 18). MIFEE has also been criticized for adopting a neoliberal development approach, prioritizing corporate interests and economic rents over the well-being of the local population (Zakaria 2010, p. xiii). This has created a "civilization gap," where rapid, externally-driven development starkly contrasts with the socio-cultural and economic realities of Indigenous communities (*ibid*, p. 113). While much research has explored the logistical, environmental, and economic challenges of food estate projects, there is a notable gap in analysing how the discourse of food sovereignty has been constructed, justified, and implemented by the state. Limited attention has been given to how these projects, particularly MIFEE, intersect with indigenous rights, land use, and neoliberal development strategies.

MIFEE continues to be a topic of critical importance in discussions about food security and development in Indonesia. Fourteen years after its launch, the project embodies the complexities of large-scale agricultural development, balancing the promise of national food security with the challenges of environmental sustainability and social justice. While MIFEE has become a symbol of progress in food estate initiatives, it also highlights the tension between state-driven development and the rights of Indigenous communities, particularly in Papua. The project's impacts on local populations, coupled with ongoing environmental concerns and political dynamics, underscore the need for careful reflection on the future of such initiatives. As Indonesia continues to expand its food estate projects in other regions, MIFEE serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of inclusive development policies that prioritize both economic growth and the protection of indigenous rights and ecosystems.

### ***A WPR Approach to Policy Critique***

Despite the ambitious goals of the MIFEE project and Indonesia's broader food estate policies, their implementation has raised significant concerns about land use, local community impacts, and the framing of food security. By exploring how food security is framed and how these discourses impact local communities, this research seeks to unpack the power dynamics embedded in Indonesia's food estate initiatives. In doing so, it will also explore possible alternative strategies that could shift the discourse toward more equitable and inclusive outcomes. To address these gaps, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How has the Indonesian government framed food security in MIFEE and other food estate projects, and what assumptions and strategies drive these narratives?
2. What are the discursive and material impacts of these framings on local communities?
3. What alternative strategies can civil society use to challenge dominant food security narratives and promote equitable outcomes, drawing from the MIFEE case and similar examples?

While much research focuses on the outcomes and implementation challenges of large-scale agricultural projects, few studies critically examine how food security issues are framed within policy discourse and how such policies are enacted to bring these ideas to fruition (Ito et. al 2014; McCarthy & Obidzinski 2017). This thesis addresses that gap by applying a poststructuralist lens, specifically utilizing Carol Bacchi's *What's the Problem*

*Represented to Be?* (WPR) framework (Bacchi 2009; Bacchi & Goodwin 2018), which provides a robust tool for such analysis.

Drawing from poststructuralist influences, particularly Michel Foucault's critique of how knowledge is constructed, the WPR approach enables interrogation of how Indonesia's food security narratives are crafted and their impact on local communities. Foucault (2002) critiques traditional historical analysis by shifting the focus from continuous, linear development to an emphasis on discontinuities, ruptures, and transformations in knowledge and thought (Foucault 2002, pp. 4-6). His emphasis on "discontinuities" is crucial for understanding shifts in discourse and knowledge systems, while his method of "archaeology" explores not just what is known, but also the underlying structures and rules that govern how knowledge or truth is accepted (*ibid*, pp. 12-14). This aligns with the WPR framework, which challenges the conventional view of policies as tools for solving problems that exist 'out there.' Instead, WPR posits that policies actively construct and define the problems that they propose to solve (Bacchi & Goodwin 2018, p. 6; Bacchi 2009, p. x). Foucault further contends that knowledge is not a seamless progression but is shaped by fragmented events within specific historical contexts (Foucault 2002, pp. 24-28). This perspective directly influences the WPR approach, which shifts the view of policies from responses to problems to mechanisms that construct and define them. This 'problem-questioning' paradigm encourages critical analysis, exposing hidden assumptions that can be challenged to prompt change (Bacchi 2009, pp. xvi-xvii).

From a poststructural perspective, this approach interrogates the power relations and assumptions embedded in policy-making, examining how discourses shape what is

perceived as a "problem" and how certain knowledge practices maintain hierarchies and governance (Foucault 2002, pp. 29-33). Foucauldian poststructuralism, therefore, emphasizes critically questioning the role of policy workers and analysts in shaping governance, focusing on how knowledge practices contribute to hierarchical and unequal structures (Bacchi & Goodwin 2018, pp. 3-4). It stresses that the rules and regulations governing policy are shaped by historically contingent knowledge rather than objective truths (*ibid*, p. 5). This perspective challenges the traditional view of policy as merely a response to external problems, arguing instead that policies themselves construct and shape problems, with governments playing an active role in this process (Bacchi 2009, pp. x & 1). Foucault's critique of continuous history aligns with the WPR approach's aim to deconstruct problem representations. Both focus on the historical, social, and political contexts that shape policies, challenging the power relations and assumptions behind them. This Foucauldian perspective underpins WPR, promoting critical examination of how knowledge and power intersect in policy creation. The WPR framework focuses on key themes such as power, knowledge, discourse, problematisation, framing, and assumptions, explored through its six guiding questions (*ibid*, pp. x & 2), with a seventh step added later (Bacchi & Goodwin 2018, p. 20). Most government policies imply a problem by suggesting a need for change, even without explicitly stating it (Bacchi 2009, pp. ix-x). Building on this, the WPR approach analyses how problems are implicitly constructed and represented in the policy-making process (*ibid*, p. x). Rather than focusing on the intentions behind policies, WPR seeks to identify the deep conceptual premises embedded in problem representations. The goal is not to dismiss certain promises as empty, but to reveal the assumptions that make those policies possible. In this way, WPR

enables a deeper understanding of policies, often going beyond the insights of policymakers themselves (*ibid*, p. xix). Instead of identifying a 'real' problem, the WPR approach examines how problems are framed and represented (*ibid*, p. xxi). Policies are seen as constructs that actively generate and shape problems, a process known as problematisation (*ibid*, p. xi). All policies engage in problematising activities, meaning they inherently contain implicit representations of problems (*ibid*, p. 2). Problematisation involves constructing problems rather than simply identifying them, as policies define and shape issues through their framing rather than uncovering objective truths. Policy actors, through their interactions, dynamically shape these representations, influencing public perceptions and issues (Maddison & Denniss 2013, pp. 102-123).

Problematisation simplifies complex issues into manageable narratives, often presenting only part of the story. It is crucial to critically examine how problems are framed to understand what is included or excluded, as problem representations play a central role in governance (*ibid*, p. xii). Policy theory's notion of "framing" explores how stakeholders strategically present information to influence perceptions (Cairney 2015). For instance, the MIFEE program's development of food estates demonstrates a 'wicked' problem, characterized by conflicting perspectives and difficult solutions (Head 2017, pp. 2, 8, 14, 17). Stakeholders' interests and beliefs shape how they frame the problem, leading to different interpretations and solutions (Head 2017, p. 5). Defining a problem highlights key issues, while framing shapes how these issues are understood in policy debates (Marier 2017, p. 2). As social issues become policy problems, key actors frame them to justify government action, influenced by factors such as visibility, feasibility, and public opinion (Marier 2017, pp. 9, 11). Understanding diverse frames enhances policymaking by

providing a nuanced view of complex issues, allowing tailored interventions that consider the political, ideological, and practical implications of each frame. Engaging with these frames and recognizing their evolving nature encourages reflexivity, helps avoid oversimplification, and supports the development of context-specific solutions (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, pp. 106 & 113). The WPR approach thus uncovers implicit problem representations, examining their underlying assumptions in specific historical, cultural, and political contexts (Bacchi 2009, pp. x-xi). To address these questions, the WPR approach suggests “working backward” from concrete policies to reveal the underlying problem representations within them (Bacchi & Goodwin 2018, pp. 17, 20; Bacchi 2009, p. 3). Examining how funds are allocated in these policies further helps to identify the dominant representations of the problem (Bacchi 2009, p. 4). The WPR approach also attempts to identify and analyse the conceptual logics—the underlying meanings that must be in place for a particular problem representation to make sense—embedded within a policy (*ibid*, pp. 4-5). This process requires looking beyond the surface of the policy text to reveal the epistemological and ontological assumptions—those related to the nature of knowledge and reality—that are often taken for granted and go unquestioned (*ibid*, 2009, pp. 5-6). To analyse these assumptions, Step 1 is to identify the conceptual logics that make the problem representation coherent. This involves examining the deep-rooted cultural values and societal norms that form the foundation of the policy. Discourse analysis plays a crucial role in this process by helping to uncover how language and categories used in the policy text construct and reinforce these assumptions. Analysts should focus on identifying binaries and the categorization of groups within the policy. Reflecting on the implications of these assumptions helps us understand how they shape

the policy's approach and the potential consequences for different social groups, thus revealing the power dynamics and potential inequities embedded in the policy (*ibid* 2009, pp. 7-9). This analysis focuses not on the beliefs of policymakers but on the taken-for-granted knowledge embedded in the problem representations, extending to deep-rooted cultural values and fundamental worldviews, akin to Foucault's (1973) notion of episteme.

Bacchi's WPR Steps 2 through 6 provide a structured approach to deconstructing policy problem representations. In Step 2, Bacchi suggests exploring the deep-seated assumptions or presuppositions that underlie how a policy defines the "problem" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 21). This involves examining the foundational discourses and unexamined beliefs embedded within policy frameworks. Rather than focusing on individual intentions, Bacchi encourages analysts to understand how these discourses shape the policy's rationale, often through concepts, binaries, and taken-for-granted "truths" that sustain a particular governmental rationality (*ibid*, p. 22). This step is key to revealing how policies implicitly define and justify what they address as problems. In Step 3, Bacchi advocates a genealogical analysis to trace the historical and social roots of the problem representation, which helps to highlight alternative paths that might have shaped the issue differently (*ibid*, p. 23). This step encourages analysts to explore the historical practices and power relations that brought the issue into being in its current form, challenging assumptions of inevitability. Through this analysis, one can begin to see that policies do not simply respond to existing issues but actively construct them in particular ways, often excluding other perspectives. Step 4 then builds on this by focusing on silences and unproblematic areas within the representation, allowing analysts to question what is left unaddressed. Here, Bacchi suggests imagining different ways of framing the problem—

or even considering it as unproblematic—which can open the door to alternative approaches and ways of understanding the issue (*ibid*, p. 23). Step 5 then involves analysing the broader effects of the problem representation, which Bacchi categorizes into three types: discursive effects, which set limits on what can be thought or said about the issue; subjectification effects, which shape individuals as specific types of subjects within the discourse; and lived effects, which reflect the material impacts on people’s lives (*ibid*, p. 24). This analysis reveals the significant implications of adopting specific representations in policy. Finally, Step 6 encourages analysts to examine how dominant representations are upheld, resisted, or challenged, and to consider ways they might be disrupted. This step invites awareness of the contingency of these representations, showing that they are not fixed but can be changed through critique, alternative perspectives, or resistance (*ibid*, p. 25). Together, these steps form a comprehensive framework for critically examining and rethinking the assumptions and effects of policy problem representations. Bacchi also emphasizes that Step 7, which involves self-problematization, is essential for researchers to critically examine their own assumptions and proposals, ensuring that hidden biases or rationalities are uncovered (*ibid*, p. 20). This reflective step is particularly valuable as it deepens the understanding that policies do not merely respond to problems but actively shape and construct them. The WPR approach is applied using seven guiding prompts or questions, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Bacchi’s WPR Framework Questions

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>Question 1</b> | What’s the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?  |
| <b>Question 2</b> | What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the “problem” (problem representation)? |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>Question 3</b> | How has this representation of the “problem” come about?  |
| <b>Question 4</b> | What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the “problem” be conceptualized differently?                           |
| <b>Question 5</b> | What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the “problem”?  |
| <b>Question 6</b> | How and where has this representation of the “problem” been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced? |
| <b>Step 7</b>     | Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.   |

According to Riemann (2023), WPR proves to be a robust methodology, offering a strong, versatile, and replicable approach for policy analysis, addressing common criticisms of Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (Riemann 2023, pp. 152-153). Riemann’s application of WPR to the Cure Violence Global (CVG) initiative revealed that CVG’s framing of violence as a disease shifts the discourse away from political solutions and towards medicalization, which oversimplifies complex social issues. This case study demonstrates how WPR can uncover underlying assumptions, silences, and power dynamics in policy-making, illustrating its value in International Relations (IR) and beyond (*ibid*, pp. 158-162). Meanwhile, Bastian and Coveney (2013) applied the WPR framework to examine the discourse surrounding food security in Australia, revealing how different stakeholders frame the issue based on distinct assumptions about government responsibility (Bastian and Coveney 2013, p. 163). Their research identified four dominant representations—individual, government, community, and private enterprise—each shaped by perspectives such as neoliberalism or social determinants of health. These varying representations influence public understanding, with media and academic literature reinforcing or

challenging these frames. By highlighting the effects of these representations, such as shifting blame onto individuals or prioritizing food production over access, their study underscores the importance of critical analysis in revealing the assumptions driving policy discourse (*ibid*, pp. 164-171). This reinforces the relevance of using the WPR framework to unpack the implicit assumptions within food security policies, ensuring a comprehensive critique of how problems are constructed and addressed.

Given the time and resource constraints, this research will rely on secondary data, allowing for the systematic analysis of a wide range of pre-existing datasets. The research officially took place between August 28, 2024 and November 18, 2024. Since the case of MIFEE is located in Papua, Indonesia, while the author is conducting her master's studies in Canberra, Australia, logistical challenges related to permits, funding, and travel arrangements made direct fieldwork unfeasible within the available timeframe. Therefore, secondary data offered an efficient approach, accelerating the research process while providing access to comprehensive datasets that provide a rich understanding of the case (Johnston 2014). This discourse-based approach aligns with the WPR framework, which encourages the analysis of various sources, such as media reports, official announcements, and academic literature, to reveal implicit understandings that require deeper scrutiny (Bacchi 2009, pp. xvi-xviii). By utilizing secondary sources—including media reports, stakeholder statements, academic articles, official documents, and statistical data—this study aims to uncover the discursive framing of Indonesia's food estate policies. Using WPR approach, the collected documents were closely read to identify dominant narratives and framing strategies, revealing tensions between policy objectives, such as food sovereignty, and outcomes, including environmental and community impacts. By doing so,

this study provides a strong foundation for future research, more detailed investigations into the evolution of food estate policies and programs.

In examining Indonesia's food estate program, this study will review key policy documents and legislation, organized hierarchically from the 1945 Constitution (Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia 1945), laws (Undang-Undang), government regulations (Peraturan Pemerintah), and regional regulations (Peraturan Daerah) (Pramesti 2024). Additionally, legal instruments such as presidential decrees, instructions, and ministerial decisions related to MIFEE (Hidayatulloh 2023) will be critically analyzed to assess their relevance (see Table 2). The media sources for this study primarily include Kompas Media—drawing from Kompas Daily Newspaper, Kompas.id (online platform), and Kompaspedia archives—as well as Tempo Magazine and its digital subscriptions, with a focus on coverage of food estate issues. The researcher has privileged access to Kompas archives, utilizing advanced search tools that enable precise and accurate retrieval of relevant information. Both are recognized as credible national media outlets with a longstanding reputation for accurate reporting. These sources represent diverse discourses: Kompas, a prominent national media outlet, often reflects mainstream perspectives, while Tempo is known for its critical approach to government policies. Additionally, this study incorporates official government releases and reports from non-profit organizations to capture a range of narratives and agendas, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the discourses shaping food estate policies. Additionally, this study will incorporate Gee's (2014) discourse analysis as a complementary tool to scrutinize the roles of government, private enterprise, and community actors in shaping public perceptions and policy narratives. This methodology enables a comprehensive

examination of the MIFEE project, uncovering the broader discursive and power structures that inform Indonesia's food security strategies. The materials for this study were identified using a combination of resources to ensure a comprehensive collection of relevant documents. Primary sources were accessed through databases provided by the ANU library and the Kompas archive, which offers advanced search tools for precise and accurate retrieval of information. Additionally, targeted Google searches were employed to supplement these resources, particularly for identifying relevant media reports, government publications, and non-profit organization reports. This multi-pronged approach allowed for a diverse and balanced selection of materials, ensuring the inclusion of various perspectives and narratives on food estate policies.

Table 2. Policies and Regulations Promoting MIFEE

|   |
|---|
| <b>2010</b>   |
| Presidential Regulation No. 5/2010 on Indonesia's National Medium-Term Development Plan 2010-2014.  |
| Presidential Instruction No. 1/2010 on National Development Priorities for 2010.  |
| Government Regulation No. 18/2010 on Crop Plantation.   |
| <b>2011</b>   |
| Presidential Regulation No. 32 of 2011 on the Masterplan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development 2011-2025                                     |
| <b>2016</b>   |
| Presidential Regulation No. 3/2016 on the Acceleration of the Implementation of National Strategic Projects   |
| Presidential Regulation No. 109/2020 on the Third Amendment to Presidential Regulation No. 3 of 2016 on the Acceleration of the Implementation of National Strategic Projects |

### ***Key Arguments and Structure***

This research argues that the MIFEE program, promoted as a solution to Indonesia's food security, fundamentally *contradicts the very concept of food security as defined by the FAO, which emphasizes ensuring consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all individuals at all times*. MIFEE's implementation has rather compromised the food security of local communities, particularly the Marind Anim people, by displacing their traditional food systems and disrupting access to local food sources. Large-scale agricultural projects, focusing on commercial crops, have destroyed forests that once provided vital sustenance, leaving Indigenous communities increasingly dependent on external food supplies. As a result, populations that were once self-sufficient now face food insecurity, despite MIFEE's claims of enhancing national and global food production. This paradox highlights the program's failure to secure food at the household and individual levels, a core component of true food security. The term *gastrocolonialism* (Arif 2024; Chao 2022) aptly describes this phenomenon, where local food systems are displaced in favour of large-scale agricultural ventures driven by state and corporate interests. By prioritizing commercial agricultural expansion and the capitalization of natural resources, MIFEE has exacerbated food insecurity for those most directly affected by these policies (McDonnell 2021; Zakaria 2011b; Ito, Rachman & Savitri 2014). This research critically examines how large-scale agricultural projects, framed as solutions to food security, have in fact marginalized Indigenous communities and undermined their access to local food sources. Furthermore, the government's continued promotion of large-scale food estate models—despite their failures—raises concerns that food crises are being framed as a means to justify the

capitalization of natural resources, rather than addressing the genuine food needs of the population.

This thesis is divided into four main sections, each designed to align with the research questions and guided by the seven-step *What's the Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) framework by Carol Bacchi. The **first section** addresses Bacchi's first and second questions, focusing on identifying the problem representation of food security and how the Indonesian government frames food security in the MIFEE and other food estate projects. This chapter then examines the assumptions driving this narrative and its construction as a national priority. It explores the ideological foundations of MIFEE, revealing the state's emphasis on large-scale production and commercialization as a means of achieving food sovereignty. The **second section** applies Bacchi's third and fourth questions to trace the historical and political origins of MIFEE's problem representation. This chapter uncovers the unspoken assumptions and silences within the discourse. It also critically examines alternative representations of food security, such as Indigenous practices of sustainable land management, which have been overlooked or marginalized. This section argues that the current framing of food security ignores these alternatives, perpetuating a neoliberal model of development that prioritizes profit over people. In the **third section**, Bacchi's fifth and sixth questions are used to explore the discursive and material consequences of the problem representation in MIFEE. This analysis focuses on the tangible impacts of MIFEE on local communities, particularly in terms of land dispossession and increased dependence on external food supplies. It also examines how narratives surrounding MIFEE reinforce dominant ideologies of food production while marginalizing Indigenous voices. Furthermore, this section considers how local actors and civil society organizations have

resisted and challenged these dominant narratives, advocating for more inclusive and equitable food policies. The **final section** engages with Bacchi's seventh step and serves as a reflective chapter, evaluating how this research has addressed the key research questions while providing insights into the broader implications of the findings. It reflects on what the analysis reveals about the nature of food security in Indonesia and how the MIFEE case can inform future policy discussions. This chapter also incorporates reflections on my positionality as both a journalist and a researcher, acknowledging how my perspectives and experiences have shaped the analysis. I align with perspectives advocating for local-led initiatives that prioritize sustainable practices and empower Indigenous communities. As highlighted by Arif (2021) in *Masyarakat Adat & Kedaulatan Pangan*, inclusive development approaches in Indonesia often fail to account for the unique situations and diversity of Indigenous communities, despite the potential of local resources to serve as pillars for achieving food sovereignty. An inclusive model should consider the diverse characteristics of local communities, particularly Indigenous food systems that rely on land and forests, and move beyond measuring agricultural success solely by the production of a limited range of staple crops. Furthermore, Chao's (2022) concept of *Gastrocolonialism* informs my critique of policies like MIFEE, which often prioritize state and corporate interests while disrupting local food systems and marginalizing Indigenous sovereignty. These insights have shaped my analysis of the tensions between state-driven industrial models and community-centered alternatives, emphasizing the importance of respecting local knowledge and practices. By acknowledging these positions, I aim to remain transparent about how my values intersect with the research process, ensuring a balanced and reflective analysis.

## CHAPTER 2. UNPACKING THE FOOD SECURITY DISCOURSE

This chapter addresses the first research question: "How has the Indonesian government framed food security in MIFEE and other food estate projects, and what assumptions and strategies drive these narratives?" using Q1 and Q2 from the WPR framework as a guide. I argue that the government frames food security primarily as a lack of self-sufficiency in food production, with large-scale agricultural development seen as the solution. This framing is rooted in the belief that food self-sufficiency is central to Indonesia's national identity, tied to pride and sovereignty. Under President SBY, MIFEE was introduced as a key initiative to address food security, focusing on corporate-driven agricultural expansion and land acquisition, positioning food security as vital to national sovereignty. President Jokowi expanded this framing to include responses to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing food security as a matter of national defence. Both administrations viewed large-scale agricultural projects, backed by corporate investment, as crucial to achieving food security, reflecting Indonesia's agrarian identity and its aspirations for global leadership.

### ***Representing Food Security in the MIFEE Case***

The first question in the WPR approach asks, "what is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?" with the goal of identifying the implied problem representations within policies or proposals (Bacchi 2009, pp. 2 & 4). In the case of the food security initiative, the problem is primarily framed as a lack of national self-sufficiency in food production, with the proposed solution centred on large-scale agricultural development. The policies emphasize the creation of food estates, particularly through the MIFEE program, as the

main mechanism for achieving food security. Additionally, the problem is represented as a lack of economic capacity, addressed by offering various incentives and streamlined processes to attract private investment in the agricultural sector. My analysis in this section is mainly supported by government statements on the concept of "food estates" and regulations issued between 2009 and 2011 around the launch of MIFEE on August 11, 2010.

Under President SBY, policies aimed at strengthening food security by increasing domestic production emerged in response to the global food and energy crises of 2007–2008. These policies focused on developing food estates through corporate investment in large-scale agricultural schemes. The problem was framed as a lack of domestic food production, with food estates positioned as the primary solution. This approach emphasized land acquisition, investment, and agricultural modernization, portraying food security as a technical challenge to be addressed by expanding land use and increasing production. The concept of "food estate" itself began gaining traction in 2009 as part of the government's broader efforts to promote large-scale agricultural initiatives. The term "food estate" first appeared in the media on November 23, 2009, when the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Hatta Rajasa, stated:

*"Adapun Papua akan difokuskan ke Merauke, yang disiapkan sebagai food estate (kawasan kota sentra makanan). Dengan demikian, akan ada empat koridor KEK plus satu food estate" (OIN 2009, p. 18)*

"Papua will focus on Merauke, which is being prepared as a food estate (a central food production area). Therefore, there will be four Special Economic Zones (KEK) corridors plus one food estate" (OIN 2009, p. 18).

This statement introduced the idea of Papua—particularly Merauke—as a central food production area, alongside four other locations designated as Special Economic Zones (*Kawasan Ekonomi Khusus*-KEK). Additionally, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Bayu Krisnamurthi, who also served as the Deputy Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs in Agriculture and Maritime Affairs, was assigned to manage investments in the agricultural sector, including food crop agriculture. Minister of Agriculture, Suswono, emphasized the significance of this role, noting that with the establishment of food estates, food crop agriculture would increasingly be managed corporately, requiring special attention (MAS 2009c, p. 18). These statements reflect a food security approach focused on developing centralized food production areas, framing the issue as one that can be addressed through large-scale agricultural development and mechanization.

A few months later, on January 20, 2010, the government introduced the National Medium-Term Development Plan (Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional - RPJMN) 2010-2014, identifying food security as the fifth of eleven national development priorities. This plan outlined six key action programs: (1) Land and Agricultural Spatial Planning, involving the establishment of regulations, the development of 2 million hectares of new agricultural land, and the optimization of idle land; (2) Infrastructure Development to support agricultural production and marketing; (3) Enhancing Agricultural Research and Development to improve the quality and productivity of agricultural outputs;

(4) Promoting Investment and Subsidies to encourage private and public sector involvement in food, agriculture, and rural industries; (5) Improving Nutritional Quality and Food Diversity to ensure better dietary outcomes; and (6) Adapting Agricultural Systems to Climate Change by implementing concrete measures to mitigate its impacts (Appendix of Presidential Regulation No. 5/2010, Book 1, pp. 33 & 55). These actions were projected to increase the agricultural sector's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 3.7% annually and raise the Farmer's Exchange Rate Index (Nilai Tukar Petani) to between 115 and 120 by 2014 (Appendix of Presidential Regulation No. 5/2010, Book 1, pp. 33, 54 & 55). Specific production targets were set, including a 3.22% annual increase in rice production, 10.02% for maize, 20.05% for soybeans, 12.55% for sugar, and 7.3% for beef (Appendix of Presidential Regulation No. 5/2010, Book 1, p. 47). This policy framed food security as a key priority to be achieved through large-scale agricultural land expansion, infrastructure development, and increased investment, positioning agricultural modernization and productivity as the primary solutions to the country's food security challenges.

The food security initiative, which would manifest through the establishment of food estates, was explicitly introduced in Presidential Instruction No. 1/2010 on National Development Priorities for 2010, issued on February 19, 2010. The policy emphasized that the development of food estates must be both environmentally sustainable and respectful of local social structures. As stated in the instruction:

*"Pengembangan lahan pangan skala luas (seperti food estate) yang ramah lingkungan dan tidak merusak pranata sosial setempat"* (Presidential Instruction No. 1/2010, p. 17).

"The development of large-scale agricultural land (such as food estates) that is environmentally sustainable and does not disrupt local social structures" (Presidential Instruction No. 1/2010, p. 17).

The instruction further mandated that by June 2010, a Grand Design for the Papua Food Estate be completed, with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Papua Provincial Government, and the Merauke Regency Government designated as the responsible authorities. Additionally, the Ministry of Agriculture was tasked with finalizing regulations for crop plantation businesses, licensing, investment preparation, and demonstration plots. The Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs was responsible for drafting regulations for the KEK, while local governments were instructed to develop further regulations related to spatial planning and land management (Presidential Instruction No. 1/2010, p. 17). The focus on regulatory frameworks, investment facilitation, and infrastructure development implies that the problem of food security is represented as one that can be addressed by establishing food estates, optimizing land use, and enhancing agricultural productivity through collaboration between corporate and government entities.

Alongside the release of this policy, the Deputy Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs announced that the preparation for food estates would require 1 to 1.5 years, emphasizing the need for private investment to support infrastructure development. He stated:

*"Insentif yang bakal diberikan kepada investor tidak di komoditas, tetapi di KEK, seperti dalam bentuk insentif fiskal maupun nonfiskal"* (MAS & DAY 2010, p. 21)

"The incentives to be given to investors are not for commodities but for the KEK, including both fiscal and non-fiscal incentives" (MAS & DAY 2010, p. 21).

The government promised a range of fiscal incentives, including reductions in income tax, property tax, regional levies, and exemptions from Value-Added Tax (VAT). Customs and excise benefits included deferred import duties, excise exemptions, and reductions in import income tax. Additionally, non-fiscal incentives featured streamlined licensing and immigration processes to further attract investment (MAS 2010b, p. 18).

In terms of land acquisition for the food estate program in Merauke, Government Regulation No. 18/2010 on Crop Plantation under Law No. 41/2009 on the Protection of Sustainable Agricultural Land was introduced, allowing for larger plantation sizes in Papua—up to 20,000 hectares—double the limit set elsewhere. The regulation states:

*"Luas maksimum lahan untuk perusahaan budidaya tanaman sebagaimana dimaksud pada ayat (1) yaitu 10.000 Ha (sepuluh ribu hektar)"* meaning, "The maximum land area for crop cultivation is 10,000 hectares" (Government Regulation 18/2010, Pasal 8, Ayat 2).

*"Untuk wilayah Papua, luas maksimum lahan dapat diberikan dua kali luas maksimum sebagaimana..,"* which translates as, "For the Papua region, the

maximum land area can be double this limit" (Government Regulation 18/2010, Pasal 8, Ayat 3).

The regulation also stipulates that the government grants investors land use rights (Hak Guna Usaha-HGU) for a period of 35 years. This tenure can be extended twice, with each extension lasting 35 years and 20 years, respectively. This aligns with the government's framing of food security as a problem to be addressed through large-scale land acquisition and corporate-driven agricultural expansion. The emphasis on attracting investment, particularly by designating Merauke as a KEK and offering generous incentives, reflects the assumption that inadequate economic infrastructure and insufficient investment in the agricultural sector are central issues. Even before formalizing these policies, the government had been actively courting investments from countries like the Middle East, China, and Korea, with the project initially targeting 1.7 million hectares of land by 2008 (EIA & Telapak 2009, p. 19).

With these important regulations in place, MIFEE was officially launched on August 11, 2010. However, the project did not immediately run smoothly. On April 11, 2011, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture noted that MIFEE was still awaiting spatial planning approvals and highlighted the investment allocation for MIFEE, which would be incorporated into the 2011-2015 masterplan. He stated:

*"Itu termasuk proyek di Papua Rp 89 triliun, MIFEE, yang masih menunggu RUTR (Rencana Umum Tata Ruang" (OIN 2011, p. 19).*

"That includes the project in Papua, valued at Rp 89 trillion for MIFEE, which is still awaiting the General Spatial Plan (RUTR)" (OIN 2011, p. 19).

Shortly after, on May 20, 2011, President SBY signed Presidential Regulation No. 32/2011 on the Masterplan for the Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development 2011-2025 (Masterplan Percepatan dan Perluasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Indonesia-MP3EI). This regulation outlined Indonesia's economic development strategy through six 'economic corridors' with eight strategic programs and 22 key economic activities nationwide, requiring an investment of Rp 4012 trillion. With this plan, Indonesia aimed to become one of the world's top 10 economies and establish itself as a major global food supplier by 2025. The food estate program was a key component of this vision, solidifying the MIFEE program as a critical part of national development.

Under President Jokowi administration (2014-2024) the food estate program continued as a central strategy to strengthen food security. In 2016, food estates were classified as national strategic projects (Proyek Strategis Nasional), with developments planned in West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Maluku, and Papua (Presidential Regulation No. 3/2016). By 2020, the program was further reinforced as part of the "National Food Supply Improvement Program" (Presidential Regulation No. 109/2020). Beyond regulatory frameworks, President Jokowi framed the food estate initiative as a response to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. During his visit to inspect the food estate sites in Kapuas and Pulang Pisau Regencies, Central Kalimantan, on July 9, 2020, President Jokowi highlighted the importance of food estates, saying:

*"Bukan hanya soal prediksi krisis pangan karena situasi pandemi Covid-19, tetapi juga karena musim yang kian tidak bisa diprediksi"* (IDO 2020, p. 11).

"It's not just about predicting a food crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of increasingly unpredictable weather patterns" (IDO 2020, p. 11).

Under his administration, food security was positioned as a literal matter of national security, evidenced by the appointment of Minister of Defence Prabowo Subianto to lead the food estate project, particularly in Central Kalimantan. According to President Jokowi at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta on July 13, 2020:

*"Ketahanan di bidang pangan juga jadi salah satu bagian pertahanan. Karena ini (Kalimantan Tengah) cadangan strategis pangan kita, leading sector-nya akan kita berikan kepada Menteri Pertahanan Prabowo Subianto yang tentu didukung Menteri Pertanian dan Menteri Pekerjaan Umum dan Perumahan Rakyat"* (Saputra 2020, p. 3).

"Food security is also part of our national defence. Since Central Kalimantan is our strategic food reserve, the leadership of this project will be entrusted to Minister of Defence Prabowo Subianto, with support from the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Public Works and Housing" (Saputra 2020, p. 3).

By analysing the regulations and statements from public officials regarding food estates, it becomes clear that the problem represented in the MIFEE policies is framed primarily

as Indonesia's lack of self-sufficiency in food production, with large-scale agricultural expansion viewed as the key solution. MIFEE was positioned as a flagship initiative aimed at enhancing national food security through corporate-driven agriculture and extensive land acquisition, designating Merauke as a strategic production hub. Under President Joko Widodo, the framing of the food estate policies has evolved to address not only food self-sufficiency but also external crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and increasingly unpredictable climate conditions. The food estate program during Jokowi's administration emphasizes food security as a matter of national defence, reinforcing the narrative that large-scale agricultural projects, spearheaded by high-ranking government figures like the Minister of Defence, are essential to securing Indonesia's food supply in times of crisis.

#### ***Unveiling Assumptions: The Ideological Foundations of MIFEE***

Having examined how the problem of food security is represented in the MIFEE case, the next step is to address the second question in the WPR framework: "What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the 'problem'?" The goal is to identify and analyse the conceptual logics embedded within a policy; the underlying meanings that must be in place for a particular problem representation to make sense (Bacchi 2009, pp. 4-5). The underlying assumptions of the problem representation of a lack of self-sufficiency in food production are deeply tied to Indonesia's identity as an agrarian nation, where the ability to feed its population is considered a matter of national pride and sovereignty. This is encapsulated in the slogan "feed Indonesia, feed the world," which

accompanies the MIFEE development and frames food security not only as achieving self-sufficiency but also as positioning Indonesia as a global agricultural leader.

During President SBY's tenure, the slogan "Feed Indonesia, Feed the World" was actively promoted to reinforce food security through enhanced food sovereignty. Ito et al. (2014) highlight that President SBY emphasized both domestic and international collaboration, positioning Indonesia as a key player in global food stability. Domestically, he organized meetings with cabinet members and the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KADIN) to drive agribusiness expansion and create special agricultural zones. Internationally, he initiated diplomatic outreach, sending proposals to global leaders, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the World Bank President, advocating for a coordinated approach to food, energy, and climate challenges. He notably endorsed the World Bank's "New Deal for Global Food Policy" and promoted cooperation through letters to G-8 leaders and ASEAN. (p. 38 – 40). According to them, these initiatives culminated in the 2010 "Feed Indonesia, Feed the World" conference and exhibition. However, the slogan's public debut occurred earlier, in 2009, through two major events. The first was the Symposium on Leading Food Commodities, hosted by KADIN in May 2009 in Jakarta, which launched a series of nine symposia forming KADIN's food security roadmap (MAS 2009f, p. 18). The second was the National Food Exhibition on 2009, October 22-25, where the slogan "Feed the World" appeared in advertisements in September 2009, under the tagline, "Toward Competitive and Sustainable Self-Sufficiency, Promoting Leading Products as Key Exports" (Kompas 2009, p. 10). It is understandable

that the 2010 conference provided wider visibility for the slogan, as the 2009 promotion had been relatively minimal.

**Image 1:** Advertisement for the 2009 National Food Exhibition “Feed The World”

**PAMERAN PANGAN NASIONAL**

**Feed The World**

**22 - 25 OKTOBER 2009**  
ASSEMBLY HALL, JAKARTA CONVENTION CENTER

**"MENUJU SWASEMBADA YANG KOMPETITIF DAN BERKELANJUTAN SERTA MENDORONG PRODUK-PRODUK UNGGULAN MENJADI PRIMADONA UTAMA"**

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Source : Harian Kompas (2009)

The same slogan and tagline appears for the second time when KADIN held the National Food Seminar and Exhibition on 2010 January, 28-31. At the event's opening, President SBY expressed his commitment to partnering with the private sector to develop food production (MAS & DAY 2010b, p. 18). The Head of Kadin's Permanent Committee for Food Resilience, Fransiscus Wilerang, emphasized the importance of domestic food security, stating:

"Considering Indonesia's potential to achieve food self-sufficiency, we must view the global food crisis as an opportunity and contribute to efforts to feed the world" (Maulia 2010).

Image 2: Advertisement for the 2010 National Food Exhibition “Feed The World” on January, 20 and 27

**HADIR DAN SAKSIKAN!**

28 - 31  
JANUARI 2010  
HALL A - JCC

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“Menuju Swasembada Yang Kompetitif Dan Berkelanjutan Serta Mendorong Produk-produk Unggulan Menjadi Primadona Dunia”

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**HADIR DAN SAKSIKAN!**

28 - 31 JANUARI 2010, HALL A - JAKARTA CONVENTION CENTER

“Menuju Swasembada Yang Kompetitif Dan Berkelanjutan Serta Mendorong Produk-produk Unggulan Menjadi Primadona Dunia”

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Image 3: Advertorial of The Conference explaining the government's positive response.

Advertorial

## Feed The World Conference and Exhibition

# Pemerintah Respon Positif

**Ketahanan pangan berkelanjutan.** Feed the World Conference and Exhibition yang digelar KADIN Indonesia di Jakarta Convention Center (29/1) diharapkan menjadi wahana mendukung ketahanan pangan nasional secara berkelanjutan hingga mampu pula memasok kebutuhan dunia. Presiden, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono didampingi Menteri Pertanian, Suswono (paling kiri), sedang berdialog dengan para petani plasma binaan industri perkebunan nasional di Riau.

Source: Harian Kompas (2010)

In the “Feed Indonesia, Feed The World” discussion held in Jakarta on September 26, the Deputy Chair of KADIN’s Permanent Committee on Plantations, Teguh Patriawan, emphasized the critical need to strengthen food security, given Indonesia’s high food import costs. From January to June 2011, food imports reached nearly USD 4 billion, equivalent to approximately IDR 36.2 trillion (OSA 2011, p. 18). The vision was reaffirmed at the 2012 National Food Security Summit, held under the theme “Feed Indonesia, Feed the World.” President SBY emphasized the importance of cross-sector collaboration—including government, private sector, researchers, farmers, and food industry stakeholders—to bolster national food security. In his opening remarks at the event on February 2, 2012, in Jakarta, President SBY stated:

*“Mari kita bersatu mengatasi masalah ketahanan pangan ini seraya mencari peluang baru untuk mengembangkan ketahanan pangan dunia, termasuk pengembangan bisnis di bidang pangan” (MAS et al. 2012, pp. 1 & 15).*

*“Let us unite to address food security issues while exploring new opportunities to enhance global food resilience, including the growth of the food business sector” (MAS et al. 2012, pp. 1 & 15).*

President SBY promoted the concept of enhanced food sovereignty using a slogan that powerfully linked national self-sufficiency with broader goals of food security and sovereignty, creating a framework that ultimately enabled corporate control over land resources (Neilson and Wright, 2017, p. 138). In support of this vision, the Merauke government adapted the slogan, reframing it as “Feeding Indonesia, Feeding the World” to justify a proposed 1.2 million-hectare land allocation for agribusiness. This initiative,

however, conflicted with the Papua Provincial Government's recommendation to cap the allocation at 500,000 hectares, citing environmental concerns and a commitment to the emissions reduction target of 26 percent, pledged by President SBY at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen—a goal supported by the Ministry of Forestry (Ito et al., 2014, p. 42).

President SBY's perspective also reveals a pragmatic view of crises as opportunities, as he articulated:

*"Orang yang cerdas selalu melihat tantangan sebagai peluang. Kalau di satu sisi ada kekurangan pangan, itu ada peluang, ada ruang untuk memproduksi sesuatu sehingga bisa menyerap tenaga kerja, meningkatkan daya beli, sehingga kebutuhan pangan masyarakat bisa dipenuhi"* (MAS et al. 2012, pp. 1 & 15).

"A smart person always sees challenges as opportunities. If there's a food shortage on one hand, then there's an opportunity—a space to produce something that can create jobs, increase purchasing power, and ultimately meet the food needs of the community" (MAS et al., 2012, pp. 1 & 15).

This stance underscores a broader vision, where national food crises not only demand solutions but also present openings for economic and employment growth, tying the rhetoric of food sovereignty to economic resilience and productivity within Indonesia's agrarian sector.

The “Feeding Indonesia, Feeding the World” slogan reflects Indonesia’s ambition to enhance food sovereignty while creating economic growth opportunities through agribusiness. Investment in MIFEE, reported at approximately IDR 89 trillion initially (OIN 2011, p. 19), later estimated at IDR 50–60 trillion by 2014 (Widiastuti et al., 2023, p. 123), highlights the government’s commitment to positioning agribusiness as a core driver of economic development. By expanding agricultural output in Merauke, the project aims to reduce Indonesia’s reliance on food imports and simultaneously tap into the global food market, linking food production to broader economic objectives. The economic rationale behind MIFEE and similar projects is further underscored by the projected benefits outlined in the MIFEE Grand Design. By 2030, MIFEE is expected to generate substantial food reserves, including 1.95 million tons of rice, 2.02 million tons of corn, and 2.5 million tons of sugar annually, positioning Indonesia as a major food supplier while reducing import costs. Additionally, the project aims to elevate Merauke’s per capita GDP to IDR 124.2 million and save an estimated IDR 4.7 trillion in foreign exchange by reducing dependency on food imports (Hardianto, 2010, p. 41). These projections illustrate the broader economic vision in feeding the world initiatives, where Indonesia’s food security efforts are strategically intertwined with economic growth. Through agribusiness expansion and reduced import dependency, Indonesia seeks to bolster both its economy and its influence in the global food supply chain. Such projections illustrate how food security, under the “feeding the world” discourse, is deeply entwined with assumptions about national economic strength and regional development. This reflects a broader logic where crises—such as food shortages—are viewed not merely as problems to be solved but as opportunities for economic resilience and productivity within Indonesia’s agrarian

sector. Thus, food security initiatives are represented not only as a means to ensure food availability but also as a strategic pillar of Indonesia's economic and global positioning.

Upon assuming office, President Jokowi's administration quickly enacted a series of nationalist policies. These included imposing stricter import restrictions, such as a ban on rice imports, with the objective of achieving full food self-sufficiency (Aspinall, 2016, p. 74). This commitment to food sovereignty was strongly reinforced in 2015, when President Jokowi declared his determination to reduce dependency on food imports, framing it as an issue of national pride (*kedaulatan*) and underscoring the importance of Indonesia's self-sustenance (Neilson and Wright, 2017, p. 139). Additionally, other high-profile actions highlighted this nationalist approach, including the publicized destruction of foreign fishing vessels seized in Indonesian waters and the execution of individuals—mostly foreign nationals—convicted of drug offenses (Aspinall, 2016, p. 74). Food security thus became a central pillar of the national policy agenda, with successive governments committing substantial political capital to address this pressing concern (McCarthy and Obidzinski, 2017, p. 345). In President Jokowi's State Address during the Annual Session of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat-MPR) on 2020, August 17, he emphasized the development of food estates to strengthen domestic food reserves. In his speech, he stated:

*"Food estate, lumbung pangan, sedang dibangun untuk memperkuat Cadangan pangan nasional, bukan hanya di hulu tetapi juga bergerak di hilir produk pangan Industri dengan pemanfaatan kecanggihan digital bukan hanya untuk pasar domestic tapi juga internasional"*

"Food estates, or food baskets, are being developed to reinforce national food reserves—not only at the upstream level but also downstream in the food product industry, utilizing digital advancements for both domestic and international markets."

In his inaugural speech as the 8th President of Indonesia on October 20, 2024, at the Parliament Building in Jakarta, President Prabowo Subianto emphasized that achieving food self-sufficiency would be a central focus of his administration. He stated:

*"Bersama pakar-pakar yang membantu saya, saya yakin dalam 4-5 tahun kita akan swasembada pangan. Bahkan kita siap menjadi lumbung pangan dunia"*

"With the support of experts working alongside me, I am confident that within 4-5 years, we will achieve food self-sufficiency. Moreover, we are prepared to establish Indonesia as a global food hub."

The Indonesian government has framed food security in MIFEE and other food estate projects as an essential component of both national sovereignty and economic growth. Under the slogan "Feeding Indonesia, Feeding the World," successive administrations have promoted food sovereignty as a core national objective, positioning Indonesia as a self-reliant food producer with global ambitions (Neilson and Wright 2017). The development of MIFEE in Papua, in particular, reflects an assumption that Indonesia's food security hinges on large-scale agribusiness expansions in underutilized regions, where resources can be harnessed for both national consumption and international

markets (Ito et al. 2014). This framing aligns food production with economic development, with MIFEE anticipated to yield substantial food reserves, reduce import costs, and contribute to regional GDP growth (Hardianto 2010). Strategically, this food security narrative emphasizes both pride in self-sufficiency and economic resilience, with projects like MIFEE expected to reduce Indonesia's import dependency and enhance its standing in global food markets. The Jokowi administration reinforced this by implementing food import restrictions and emphasizing food estates as a means of bolstering domestic reserves and supporting the food product industry through digital advancements (Aspinall 2016; McCarthy and Obidzinski 2017). These initiatives underscore a broader nationalistic narrative where food sovereignty not only serves as a buffer against food crises but also as a vehicle for economic and employment growth, cementing food security as a pillar of Indonesia's economic strategy and global positioning.

### ***Key Findings***

This chapter has addressed the first research question: "How has the Indonesian government framed food security in MIFEE and other food estate projects?" Utilizing WPR Questions 1 and 2, and drawing on government policy, official documents, and direct statements from key figures, I have found that the government frames food security within a vision of self-sufficiency, closely linked to national pride and sovereignty. Both President SBY and President Jokowi emphasized large-scale agricultural development as essential, positioning food estates as key to achieving national and economic resilience. The MIFEE project in Merauke, for instance, was envisioned as a high-yield agricultural hub to secure food independence and serve as a "food basket" for Indonesia. President SBY initially

framed food security as critical to both national and global influence, while President Jokowi expanded this framing, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, by linking food security to national defence and assigning top officials to lead food estate initiatives. This narrative underscores an agrarian identity that values self-reliance, aiming to enhance Indonesia's standing as a global food supplier. The government's approach, which includes incentives for investors and a push for corporate-led agriculture, reflects an assumption that food security challenges arise from insufficient production and infrastructure. Therefore, food estate projects are presented not only as responses to crises but also as catalysts for economic growth, job creation, and regional development. This supports the argument that the government frames food security primarily as a lack of self-sufficiency, with large-scale agricultural development framed as the solution, rooted in a belief that self-sufficiency is central to Indonesia's identity, pride, and sovereignty.

### CHAPTER 3. THE DISCURSIVE & IMPACTS OF MIFEE

This chapter addresses the second research question, “What are the discursive and material impacts of these framings on local communities?” guided by Questions 3 and 4 of the WPR framework. I argue that Indonesia's framing of food security—as an issue of self-sufficiency and national pride—produces both symbolic and practical consequences for local communities, especially those in regions designated for large-scale agricultural projects like MIFEE. The findings reveal how Indonesia's narrative of food sovereignty, rooted in its post-colonial era, continues to shape government policies centered on food self-sufficiency. The selection of Merauke in Papua as a project site reflects the assumption that Papua is a "frontier" region, perceived as rich in untapped potential for state and corporate expansion. This perspective positions Papua as a strategic opportunity for expanding territory and controlling valuable resources. Consequently, successive administrations have framed food production as more than an economic objective; it has become a nationalist goal tied to Indonesia's aspirations for self-sufficiency and sovereignty. By presenting food security as a symbol of national strength, the government justifies large-scale agricultural projects aligned with political and economic agendas. This framing has notable discursive impacts, shaping public and policy narratives around agriculture, nationalism, and development. It pressures local communities to accept initiatives like MIFEE as part of a "greater good" for the nation. Materially, the MIFEE project demonstrates how this framing leads to tangible consequences for the local population. Driven by economic incentives and political influence, local elites and Indonesian conglomerates aim to transform Merauke into a large-scale food estate, often

disregarding traditional land rights, livelihoods, and environmental concerns of indigenous communities. As a result, the representation of food security as self-sufficiency has facilitated land acquisitions and investments in agribusiness, potentially leading to displacement, loss of local agricultural practices, and shifts in community structures.

### ***Origins of The Problem Representation***

The third question in the WPR approach asks, “how has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?” with the purpose to highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to take shape and assume dominance (Bacchi 2009, p. 10-11). The representation of food security as a lack of self-sufficiency has deep historical roots in Indonesia. Since the post-colonial era, food production has been framed as a symbol of national prosperity and well-being. Under President Sukarno (1949 – 1966), Indonesia’s first president, the rhetoric of “feeding the *bangsa*” or “feeding the nation” emphasized food availability as a critical national issue. In 1952, Sukarno, emphasized this point during his oration at the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the Faculty of Agriculture at Universitas Indonesia:

“why bother talking about political freedom if we don’t have freedom to manage our rice, and always have to beg for help buying rice from our neighbouring nations?” (Sukarno 1952).

Sukarno emphasized the importance of “food availability for the people” (*soal persediaan makanan rakyat*), advocating increased rice production to meet caloric needs, which he framed as essential to “feeding the nation” (Neilson & Wright, 2017, pp. 134–135). During

his regime, known as *Orde Lama*, Sukarno's agricultural policies prioritized Dutch plantation nationalization, expanding food production programs, intensifying agricultural extension programs, and resolving land disputes through land-reform initiatives (Setiawati et al., 2019, p. 591). In his speech on 1965, July 20, at the Opening of the Great Farmers' Congress (Rapat Raksasa Pembukaan Musyawarah Besar Tani), where 75% of Indonesians identified as farmers, Sukarno addressed farmers as the foundation of the revolution (Soko Guru Revolusi yang pertama), stating:

*“Tjita-tjita revolusi Indonesia hanya dapat terjapai dengan adanya tjtjuran keringat kaum tani juga, menghasilkan produksi dan pangan itu. Siapa jang berani berkata bahwa masjarakat adil dan Makmur bisa terlaksana dan terwujudjud tanpa adanya kaum tani? Hendaknja kaum tani sebagai soko guru revolusi kuat melebihi besi dan badja, sehingga kaum imperialis akan gemetar menghadapinja”, (Kompas 1965, p.1).*

“The dreams of the Indonesian revolution can only be achieved through the sweat of our farmers, producing food and sustenance. Who would dare say that an equitable and prosperous society could exist without the farmers? Let the farmers, as the backbone of the revolution, be stronger than iron and steel, so that the imperialists will tremble before them” (Kompas 1965, p. 1).

On August 17, 1965 commemorating 20 years of the Indonesian independence, Sukarno delivered a speech titled “BERDIKARI: Tjapailah Bintang-bintang di Langit!” (Sukarno, 1992, p. 187). He introduced the concept of *BERDIKARI*, or self-reliance, urging the nation to stand independently. *BERDIKARI*, an acronym meaning *Berdiri di Atas Kaki Sendiri* (to

stand on one's own feet), was integral to his *Trisakti* doctrine—a threefold path to sovereignty encompassing political independence, economic self-reliance, and a distinct cultural identity. This concept emphasized the importance of economic autonomy and free from foreign dependence (Wirawan, 2023). Sukarno's emphasis on self-reliance and farmers as the backbone of the nation reflects his vision of an independent Indonesia driven by internal resources and agrarian strength. His rhetoric framed farmers not only as essential food producers but as symbols of national resilience and sovereignty. This ideological foundation continues to resonate in Indonesia's food policies, underlining a long-standing preference for self-sufficiency over import dependency in agricultural discourse.

Sukarno's vision of food self-sufficiency as a cornerstone of national identity and resilience laid the ideological groundwork for subsequent leaders to institutionalize this approach. President Suharto took up this mantle, transforming Sukarno's vision into actionable policies aimed at achieving food self-sufficiency. During Suharto's tenure (1966–1998), Sukarno's vision of food availability was actualized through major initiatives, notably the "Mega Rice Program" in Central Kalimantan, which served as a precursor to modern food estate models. According to Presidential Decree 82/1995 on Peatland Development for Food Crops in Central Kalimantan, the program aimed to convert 1 million hectares of peat and through Presidential Decree No. 83/1995 on the Establishment of the Presidential Assistance Fund for Peatland Development in Central Kalimantan, this project was shown to be valued at Rp 1.2 trillion. Suharto era, known as the New Order (Orde Baru), the rhetoric emphasized the critical role of agriculture in national development, particularly in the ongoing pursuit of food self-sufficiency. The development and use of peatlands in

Central Kalimantan, or also known as *Proyek Pengembangan Lahan Gambut* (PLG), were seen as efforts to boost production and strengthen food self-sufficiency (AS 1996, p. 17). In April 1996, the Chairman of the Indonesian Peat Association (Perhimpunan Gambut Indonesia -HGI), Bambang Setiadi, met with President Suharto and recounted Suharto's words:

*"Pak Harto (President Suharto) bilang, saudara pintar kayak apa pun kalau tak ada beras, mau apa? Itu soal filosofi."* (AS 1996, p,17)

"Pak Harto (President Suharto) said, 'No matter how smart you are, if there's no rice, what can you do? It's a matter of philosophy.'" (AS 1996, p. 17).

On another occasion, Bambang reiterated the importance of rice as the most crucial and strategic commodity. Quoting Suharto again, he explained that the New Order was fully dedicated to producing enough rice. The New Order's determination was food self-sufficiency in rice. According to Bambang, President Suharto said:

*"Negara bisa kaya raya, tetapi jika tak ada beras, rakyat akan makan apa?"*  
(Sanda 1996, p.23)

"A nation can be immensely wealthy, but without rice, what will the people eat?" (Sanda 1996, p. 23).

Bambang repeated this sentiment in 1997:

*"Suatu bangsa bisa kaya seperti apa. Tetapi jika tidak ada beras, tidak ada bahan pangan, rakyat harus makan apa?"* (Sanda 1997, p. 17)

“A nation can be as wealthy as it wants. But without rice, without food supplies, what will the people eat?” (Sanda 1997, p. 17).

The ambitious peatland development project in Central Kalimantan failed within three years. Following Suharto’s resignation in May 1998, President Habibie halted the project, which had been driven more by political motives than by technical planning. The development lacked essential data on soil, topography, hydrology, ecosystems, and local social conditions. Environmental assessments were skipped, and rushed construction led to two primary channels that disrupted the peat domes instead of functioning as effective water collectors. This mismanagement caused irreversible drying, making the land uncultivable, prone to erosion, and susceptible to fires. By the time the project was paused, only three percent of the Rp 1.2 trillion investment yielded usable land, with most irrigation channels proving ineffective. Of the 30,000 hectares opened for rice, only a fraction proved productive, leaving 54,000 transmigrants who relied on farming facing severe hardship. Unable to make the soil viable due to high acidity levels, the farmers sold off belongings and turned to collecting firewood for survival. The situation highlighted the lack of ecological and sociological studies on the peat ecosystem and local communities, with the project’s unsuitability pushing transmigrants and locals into deep economic hardship. A review team, including environmental and agricultural experts, recommended a full project redesign to prevent further degradation and impoverishment. Ending the project left behind deforested peatlands, drying rivers, and an unmet rehabilitation fund of Rp 3.9 trillion, which failed to reach the affected communities or make a significant environmental impact (Alfridel & Surjadi 1998; Alfridel 2002).

Interestingly, the concept of food sovereignty, first championed by Sukarno and later interpreted through large-scale agricultural initiatives, has taken on different meanings over time. While the government has used food sovereignty to bolster national identity, farmers interpret it differently. The Indonesian Farmers Union (Serikat Petani Indonesia, SPI) advocates for a form of food sovereignty aligned with La Via Campesina's international vision. For SPI, food sovereignty in Indonesia involves protecting domestic agriculture through policies that reject free trade agreements, remove agriculture from the WTO's purview, enforce domestic market controls, maintain production subsidies, emphasize local self-sufficiency, discourage export-focused agriculture, and support comprehensive land reform. This vision resonates with Indonesia's long-standing cultural value of rice self-sufficiency, building popular and political support for food protectionism (SPI 2008). SPI's approach highlights the importance of land ownership, local food self-sufficiency, and a shift away from export-oriented agriculture (Neilson & Arifin, 2011, p. 160). The MIFEE project illustrates how governments can co-opt the concept of food sovereignty to legitimize initiatives that, though framed as bolstering national food security, may in fact disrupt local food systems and weaken community food security (Chao, 2022, p. 824). Here, food sovereignty is positioned to align with agribusiness-led food estates, portraying them as compatible with national food security goals, even though they often undermine local food systems and community autonomy, revealing a fundamental conflict between large corporate interests and small-scale farmers, often backed by foreign capital. In the context of neoliberal agricultural restructuring, these food estates risk exacerbating the food crisis by transforming independent farmers into low-wage laborers or dependent smallholders, ultimately endangering local food sovereignty (Ginting & Pye, 2013, p. 172).

This divergence between government-led and farmer-led visions of food sovereignty underscores the clash between industrial agriculture and the sustainable, community-centered practices championed by local farmers.

Indonesia's connection between rice self-sufficiency, national pride, and identity has shaped its food policy since the post-colonial era. Rooted in Sukarno's emphasis on "feeding the nation" and later institutionalized under Suharto's New Order, this vision established self-sufficiency as a symbol of prosperity and security (Neilson & Arifin, 2013, p. 151), setting a precedent for projects like MIFEE in Papua. Modern policies continue this approach, often prioritizing commercial interests, which raises concerns about land exploitation and the marginalization of local communities. Thus, Indonesia's food security policies reveal a tension between state-centric, industrialized agriculture and the community-oriented practices promoted by small-scale farmers, highlighting the ongoing ideological conflict shaping the nation's agricultural future.

The ideology of food security and self-sufficiency in Indonesia extends beyond Java's fields and markets to include the vast, resource-rich lands of Papua. As Indonesia's "last frontier," Papua has been drawn into the national vision of agricultural expansion and food sovereignty, where large-scale projects like MIFEE attempt to integrate this contested region into the broader framework of food production and economic development. This approach reflects Indonesia's enduring emphasis on territorial unity and resource utilization, but it also exposes the complex intersections of national pride, economic interests, and local resistance within Papua. Viewing Papua as a frontier is not a recent development; it traces back to events like the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung,

where Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, garnered global support, paving the way for the Netherlands to transfer sovereignty over West Papua to Indonesia in 1963. In this context, Sukarno was keenly focused on preventing an independent West Papua. The conference's main objective was to strengthen political solidarity among newly independent states in the Global South, thus reinforcing Indonesia's anti-colonial stance. The Indonesian government pursued a strategic approach to integrate Papua, especially West Papua, into the broader nation through programs like transmigration. Between 1984 and 1999, this state-led effort relocated 300,000 farmers from other Indonesian islands to West Papua, aiming to reshape the region's demographics and foster a population more loyal to Indonesia. This transmigration program, however, significantly altered the ethnic landscape, with indigenous Papuans becoming minorities in many areas. The policy combined with military actions and surveillance, reflecting a clear geopolitical agenda designed to secure control over a resource-rich but politically contentious area where groups like the Free Papua Movement (OPM) maintained strong secessionist movements (McNamee 2023, p. 4-5). In recent years, the focus of exploitation has shifted to Papua's rich resources, marking it as Indonesia's "last frontier." Projects like MIFEE are planned for southern Papua, areas perceived by the government as "idle," "degraded," or "underused" (Brockhaus et al. 2012, p. 36). Following extensive deforestation and plantation development in Sumatra and Kalimantan, often facilitated by corrupt officials, exploitation now centres on Papua. These policies endanger Papua's tropical forests, one of the last intact rainforests in the Asia-Pacific and the third-largest tropical wilderness globally after the Amazon and Congo Basin. The planned monoculture plantations represent large-scale land grabs by powerful conglomerates with support from foreign investors, jeopardizing

the ecological and social fabric of Papua (EIA & Telapak 2009, p. 2). MIFEE represents not only a large-scale agricultural initiative but also a continuation of external exploitation and control over Indigenous lands in a region long troubled by military dominance, human rights abuses, and economic marginalization.

### ***Unspoken Assumption and Alternatives***

The purpose of Q4, “What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the ‘problem’ be thought about differently?” is to reflect on the overlooked issues and perspectives within the dominant narrative. In the case of MIFEE, its framing as a solution to food production through large-scale agriculture echoes the mistakes of earlier projects, such as the Suharto-era Mega Rice Program, which led to environmental degradation without achieving its food production goals. Despite these risks, MIFEE’s model similarly prioritizes large-scale agriculture, raising concerns that it serves as a “resource grab” for domestic and international investors, furthering environmental damage. MIFEE originated from the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE) project, but it later shifted its focus from food production to biofuel, engaging central government, corporate entities, and local elites. This rebranding highlights the project’s commercial interests and exposes key silences in the problem representation. Permits issued for MIFEE have doubled from the initial plans, with only a small fraction designated for rice production, as most permits focus on plantations for oil palm, forestry, and sugarcane. As of May 2010, 36 companies were involved in developing the food estate, with a total area of 2.05 million hectares (Regional Investment Planning Agency, 2010). By August 2010, 44 corporations had received concessions totalling 2.15 million hectares. The

land was allocated for various commodities: 44.1% for forestry (timber), 35.5% for sugarcane, 17.6% for oil palm, and 2.8% for food crop plantations (Regional Investment Coordination Board, 2010). The data indicates that, despite being labelled a "food estate," only a minimal portion is allocated to actual food crop production, suggesting that the estate is more focused on supporting industrial crops than on meeting food production needs. A significant silence within the MIFEE narrative is the lack of attention to its social impact on local communities, particularly the indigenous Malind-Anind people, whose traditional hunting and gathering livelihoods are disrupted. For example, the policy fails to address shifts in local food culture from locally sourced, natural foods to processed alternatives. Issues surrounding land rights and the potential dispossession of indigenous populations without adequate consent also remain largely ignored in policy discussions. Environmental costs, including deforestation, soil degradation, water contamination, and biodiversity loss due to monoculture plantations, are similarly unaddressed, overshadowed by a focus on agricultural productivity. Under President Jokowi, MIFEE has been sidelined in favour of a new initiative, Export-Oriented Food Estate (Lumbung Pangan Berorientasi Ekspor-LPBE), aimed at creating an export-oriented food hub. Some sources suggest this rebranding reflects Jokowi's desire to disassociate from MIFEE, positioning any future success within his administration rather than former President SBY's (Hidayat 2024). This shift further underscores the political interests that shape how MIFEE and similar projects are represented.

Overlooked issues and silences in the dominant narrative also include the roles of the various actors involved. Local elites, such as Johannes Gluba Gebze, the regent of Merauke, initiated MIFEE's precursor, the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE), primarily to

bolster political influence and secure future power by advancing his vision of a South Papua Province with himself as governor. This personal ambition aligned with the economic interests of Indonesia's elite business class, notably the Medco Group, whose founder, Arifin Panigoro, saw MIFEE as an opportunity to establish a vast food production hub in Merauke. Medco, alongside other corporate entities, invested significantly in large-scale timber, pulp, and oil palm ventures, obtaining extensive land concessions with minimal regard for the social and environmental impacts on indigenous communities (Ito et al. 2014, pp. 7-10; EIA & Telapak 2009, p. 15). While the Indonesian government promotes MIFEE as a solution to food security and regional development, the framing of these objectives leaves several issues unproblematic. For instance, the government's policies focus heavily on economic growth and corporate investment as pathways to food security, without critically addressing the social costs borne by local communities, such as land dispossession and the erosion of traditional livelihoods. The government's pursuit of foreign investments from regions like the Middle East, China, and Korea further reflects a dominant narrative that prioritizes global economic integration over the needs of the Indigenous populations in Merauke. This approach disregards the sociocultural implications of large-scale land conversions and reinforces the perception of Papua as a "frontier" for state-led development, casting aside local voices that question the sustainability of such expansive projects (Zakaria 2011, p. 10; Ito et al. 2014, pp. 10-12). These silences in the MIFEE narrative conceal the power dynamics at play, particularly the influence of corporate interests backed by state and military support. Companies like Medco and South Korea's LG International exploit the project's considerable land grants, while the presence of military forces in Merauke serves to protect these corporate

interests, frequently suppressing local dissent through intimidation tactics. (EIA & Telapak 2009; TAPOL & awasMIFEE! 2022; EJAtlas 2023). Reports indicate that corporations such as Korindo make regular payments to the military, which allegedly aids in securing their operations and repressing opposition (EIA & Telapak 2009, pp. 19-20). This entangled relationship between the state, local elites, and corporate entities highlights a problematic representation of MIFEE that overlooks the adverse impacts on indigenous land rights, cultural heritage, and environmental sustainability. The dominant framing of food security as a national priority effectively silences local grievances, while reinforcing a narrative that large-scale agribusiness is the most rational path forward—raising critical questions about whose interests are truly served by this project (AwasMIFEE 2012, pp. 6-7).

From experts and the academic community, the development of MIFEE has faced criticism for not adequately considering the local context. During a seminar titled "*Indonesia Food Estate: Can It Achieve Sustainable, Sovereign, and Equitable Agricultural Development?*" held in Bogor on 2010, December 14, Head of the Department of Science Communication and Community Development at the Faculty of Human Ecology, Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), Soeryo Adiwibowo, emphasized the need for MIFEE to adapt to the cultural practices of the Merauke community, which relies on hunting and gathering. He questioned:

“Can the government be patient in implementing the food estate, allowing time for development to close the gap?”

Supporting this view, Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management at IPB, Yusman Syaukat, noted:

"This nation tends to engage in macro-level planning, which makes it appear as if no problems exist. The approach is often purely technological and economic." (MASE 2010, p. 18)

In his presentation, Yusman further elaborated on the implications of food estate development, highlighting the risk of land being underutilized by local farmers. He warned that agriculture could shift from a "peasant-based" and "family-based" system to a "corporate-based food production" model, potentially undermining Indonesia's food sovereignty. He also pointed out that the regulations governing food estates seem to favor investors over farmers.

From the perspective of the people in Merauke, the lack of tangible benefits from previous development efforts has led to MIFEE being poorly received by the local community. A week before the MIFEE launch, Hardianto (2010) reported opinions from locals. Christianus Basik Basik, a youth leader from Wendu in Semangga District, expressed his concerns about development projects, such as the construction of paved roads that displaced community lands and sago forests, only to serve vacant land offered to investors.

"They care more about the investors than their own people," he remarked.

Job opportunities for local residents have also fallen short of expectations. Marius Moiwend, a resident of Sanggase Village in Okaba District, shared that he and several others were rejected from security guard positions at PT Medcopapua Industri Lestari due to their lack of middle school diplomas. The government has also failed to address educational needs, leaving locals at a disadvantage in the job market. Damianus Yorwen

(45), a resident of Muara Byan, recounted that his village had repeatedly asked the government to build an emergency school for their children.

"To this day, our request has not been met. Instead, they went ahead and bought airplanes," Damianus said, referring to the three Boeing 737-300 jets purchased by the Merauke Regency Government.

This situation has raised concerns that the Indigenous people of Merauke will become increasingly marginalized. Resistance to MIFEE was apparent even before its official launch, as demonstrated in a letter from the V Regional Customary Council: Ha-Anim, addressed to President SBY on July 8, 2010. The letter expressed their rejection of the MIFEE program, citing the lack of community involvement in decision-making and insufficient grassroots empowerment. (p. 41)

Despite these efforts, a major issue is the minimal involvement of civil society in shaping policies and implementing food security initiatives. Land dispossession has been justified and legitimized by a coalition of state, corporate, and local elite actors under the pretext of national development and food security (Ito et al. 2014, p. 5). Between 2007 and 2011, several key policies and regulations (Table 1) promoting agribusiness investments in Merauke were issued rapidly, with limited engagement from civil society.

This situation highlights the exclusion of civil society from critical decision-making and implementation processes. MIFEE has become a contentious issue in agricultural development debates (Chao 2022; Ito et al. 2014; Ginting & Pye 2013; Zakaria et al. 2011). Political and corporate elites have framed large-scale agriculture as an essential response

to global food and energy crises, emphasizing its potential to address both national and international challenges (Ito et al. 2014). In contrast, scholars, NGOs, CSOs, and media outlets argue that MIFEE exemplifies land grabbing, resulting in the marginalization of the Papuan people. Academics have referred to the initiative as a “textbook land grab,” with around 80 companies treating Merauke as “empty” land suitable for “fuel and food production” (EJAtlas 2023; Ginting & Pye 2013; Boras et al. 2011;). The issues surrounding MIFEE are complex and multifaceted, representing what has been termed a 'wicked problem'—one marked by conflicting perspectives and difficult solutions (Head 2017). Powerful actors have shaped the discourse to serve their economic interests, focusing on goals such as food self-sufficiency and global food security. This narrative often marginalizes indigenous Papuans, who bear the adverse effects of food estate development. Despite their efforts to raise awareness, researchers, NGOs, CSOs, and media have worked to challenge the dominant narrative by highlighting MIFEE as a case of land grabbing. Thus, the debate over food estate development in Indonesia underscores the complex interplay between power dynamics, agenda-setting, and policy outcomes, emphasizing the need to amplify marginalized voices in policy discussions.

### ***Key Findings***

The framing of food security in Indonesia, rooted in historical aspirations of self-sufficiency and national pride, a legacy tracing back to Sukarno’s post-independence rhetoric of “feeding the bangsa” and Suharto’s national rice production goals. By positioning food production as a matter of national pride and sovereignty, the state has justified large-scale agricultural projects, aligning them with political agendas and economic interests,

including those of prominent corporate entities. This nationalist framing makes these projects appear as necessary for national strength and progress, overshadowing the interests and traditional practices of local communities. The MIFEE project, for instance, has been promoted as a strategic venture for food security, yet it increasingly prioritizes commercial agriculture, largely controlled by external actors, and disregards the traditional livelihoods and cultural heritage of indigenous communities in Merauke.

Materially, MIFEE has led to large-scale land acquisitions that disrupt local communities' access to ancestral lands and resources. This focus on industrial agriculture has facilitated the transfer of land rights from indigenous populations to state and corporate interests, pushing traditional farmers and gatherers toward economic marginalization. Indigenous communities in Merauke have seen their lands reallocated for timber, pulp, and biofuel production under the pretense of enhancing national food security, yet only a small fraction is designated for actual food production. Civil society and academic voices have raised concerns about this approach, arguing that it marginalizes local populations and disrupts sustainable, community-based agricultural practices. The lack of civil society engagement in policymaking further amplifies these negative impacts, as land dispossession and environmental degradation continue with minimal accountability or local input. Consequently, while the government frames MIFEE as a step toward food sovereignty, the project's focus on corporate-led, export-oriented production largely serves elite and foreign interests, often at the expense of local food systems and community resilience.

## CHAPTER 4. ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

In this chapter, I address the third research question: “What alternative strategies can civil society use to challenge dominant food security narratives and promote equitable outcomes, drawing from the MIFEE case and similar examples?” This inquiry is guided by WPR framework questions Q5 and Q6. Q5—“What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?”—aims to reveal and critically assess the impacts of specific problem representations. Meanwhile, Q6—“How/where is the representation of the ‘problem’ produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?”—encourages examining the methods through which certain problem representations gain dominance and explores the possibilities for challenging representations deemed harmful (Bacchi 2009, p. 19). The MIFEE project illustrates the environmental and social impacts of Indonesia's dominant food security narrative, which equates food security with large-scale agricultural expansion, particularly rice self-sufficiency. This approach has led to significant deforestation, endangering indigenous livelihoods in Merauke by prioritizing plantation investments on forested land despite promises to use degraded areas. The Marind people have experienced forced dietary changes, as traditional staples like sago are displaced by rice, a crop introduced as part of a nationalistic “rice barn” agenda that undermines local cultural practices. This shift reflects what anthropologist Sophie Chao calls “gastrocolonialism,” where food policies impose “civilized” foods on indigenous communities, diminishing their cultural heritage. These impacts highlight how civil society groups might advocate for alternative strategies

that respect local ecologies and diets, promote food sovereignty, and challenge the rice-centric focus of national policy.

### ***Consequences of The Problem Representation***

The MIFEE project has had profound environmental and social consequences, most notably through deforestation that has significantly impacted the livelihoods of the people of Merauke. Although policymakers initially claimed that plantation developments would target degraded or grassland areas, an estimated 60% of the land allocated for MIFEE remains forested, with some concessions containing up to 80% forest cover. This discrepancy underscores the urgent need for policies that genuinely prioritize non-forest land for agricultural expansion. Addressing this would require robust economic incentives to encourage plantation investment on degraded lands and strict regulatory enforcement to ensure compliance (Brockhaus et al., 2012, p. 36). MIFEE highlights broader land-use conflicts in Indonesia, where food production, biofuel, and pulpwood industries intensify competition for land. Indonesian policy, historically centred on forest exploitation for economic gain, now faces the challenge of balancing forest preservation with economic growth. However, pro-private sector rhetoric and governmental hesitation to fully restrict deforestation reflect the complexities in implementing a sustainable land-use solution (*ibid*, pp. 32, 34). Civil society organizations and indigenous communities in Papua have raised strong objections to MIFEE's environmental degradation and the threat it poses to traditional livelihoods. Activists, supported by groups like WALHI, have pointed to the failures of previous peatland projects, such as the One Million Hectare Peatland Development Project in Central Kalimantan, to argue against the feasibility of similar

endeavours like MIFEE. Advocating for a moratorium on peatland permits, these groups call for regulatory reforms to protect against irresponsible land use (ICH 2014, p. 14). For the indigenous Papuan communities, forests are vital not just economically but also culturally and spiritually. Forests provide materials for housing, traditional crafts, and staple foods like the sago tree, integral to the local diet and customs. Small-scale, community-led agriculture initiatives, like cacao plantations, serve as sustainable alternatives that align with forest preservation goals advocated by REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), emphasizing both ecological and cultural continuity (EIA & Telapak 2009, p. 22). These initiatives underscore the potential for inclusive, ecologically sensitive land-use models that respect indigenous knowledge.

The dietary changes induced by MIFEE have also had profound social implications for indigenous communities, particularly the Marind people. Traditionally, the Marind's diet relies on sago, a staple with deep cultural and spiritual resonance that connects them to their land, ancestors, and community identity (Arif 2021; Arif 2022). Known as a nurturing "grandparent" in their ecosystem, sago is more than just a food source; it embodies the Marind's relationship with the land and its biodiversity (Arif & Susanto 2022). In contrast, MIFEE's drive to transform Merauke into a "national rice barn" has introduced rice and other unfamiliar crops as replacements for sago, which the Marind view as an "alien" crop tied to state forces and settler expansion. Unlike sago, rice lacks the social and ecological ties that connect the Marind to their heritage, resulting in a loss of cultural practices and ecological knowledge (Chao, 2021, pp. 9, 12, 15). Beyond its material impacts, this dietary change reflects a form of ideological imposition that anthropologist Sophie Chao (2022)

describes as “gastrocolonialism.”. She defines gastrocolonialism as a mechanism through which agribusiness expansion and state-led projects like MIFEE disrupt indigenous foodways. By imposing industrial agriculture and promoting external food staples like rice, these projects displace traditional subsistence practices centered on sago and forest ecosystems, which are integral to the Marind people's identity and cultural heritage. The concept highlights the intersection of race, food, and development, revealing how traditional diets are framed as "backward" by state and corporate actors to legitimize land dispossession and the imposition of industrial food regimes. These practices not only marginalize local food systems but also exacerbate environmental degradation and food insecurity among Indigenous communities (Chao 2022, p.813-816). Through MIFEE, the state promotes rice as a “modern” food, simultaneously devaluing traditional staples like sago by casting them as primitive or uncivilized. This enforced shift represents "alimentary racism," relegating Papuan food traditions to an inferior status compared to foods associated with “civilized” societies. Such framing reinforces a racialized hierarchy, positioning Papuan customs and ecosystems as needing modernization through industrial agriculture. The impact on Marind health and cultural heritage thus extends beyond physical sustenance, as the imposed dietary shift facilitates a slow cultural erosion under the guise of economic progress and national food security (Chao, 2022, pp. 819 - 820).

Indonesian food policy has long conflated food security with rice self-sufficiency, often at the expense of addressing broader dietary needs and food accessibility. While efforts have been made over the past decade to enhance food accessibility, these initiatives frequently fall short due to the policy’s enduring emphasis on rice production. This single-crop focus

reflects a deeply ingrained belief that rice self-sufficiency is synonymous with national prosperity and stability. Scholars argue that this narrow policy focus marginalizes other food sources and disregards Indonesia's dietary diversity, particularly in food-insecure households where rice may not be a staple. By privileging rice production, policymakers may inadvertently perpetuate food insecurity rather than support a resilient, diverse food system capable of serving Indonesia's varied population. This rice-centric policy orientation not only channels resources and subsidies primarily toward rice cultivation but also undermines investments in alternative crops and local food systems that could better serve nutritional needs. Consequently, agricultural landscapes outside Java, where rice is less central, face greater barriers to accessing infrastructure, training, and market opportunities that could diversify and strengthen local food security. The Indonesian government's preoccupation with rice self-sufficiency may thus perpetuate dependency and undermine the adaptive capacity of rural communities to support a more inclusive and sustainable food future across the archipelago (Rosin et al. 2013, pp. 148-149).

### ***Challenging and Reinforcing Narratives***

The portrayal of food security within the MIFEE project has largely been crafted and promoted through political discourse and government policy. Both President SBY and President Jokowi have framed food security as a matter of national urgency, advocating large-scale agricultural development as essential for self-sufficiency. National development plans positioned MIFEE as a central solution to Indonesia's food insecurity, embedding it within broader narratives of national pride and sovereignty. Government partnerships with both domestic and international investors further strengthened this

narrative, presenting capital-intensive, corporate agriculture as the most viable approach to addressing food insecurity. Media outlets and statements from high-level officials have disseminated this perspective, promoting MIFEE as a critical component of Indonesia's strategy to "feed the nation and the world."

This dominant representation of MIFEE has faced growing criticism. Wahyudin and Harjanto (2023), through a critical discourse analysis of media has categorized the concerns into five key areas: 1) Disruption of Forest Ecosystems: MIFEE has caused significant deforestation, threatening biodiversity and vital resources for the indigenous Malind people, who depend on the forest for both cultural practices and daily sustenance; 2) Impacts on Local Food Systems: The shift toward large-scale monoculture plantations has limited access to traditional foods like sago, essential to Marind identity, pushing communities toward less culturally significant staples like rice; 3) Human Rights Violations: The project has been linked to the displacement of indigenous communities without proper consent, with reports of intimidation and the destruction of culturally important sites; 4) Land Forfeiture: Policies supporting MIFEE have facilitated land seizures from tribal communities, undermining indigenous land rights and autonomy; and 5) Failure of MIFEE: Despite considerable investment, MIFEE has often favoured corporate interests, offering limited benefits to local communities and reinforcing socio-economic inequalities (Wahyudin & Harjanto 2023, pp. 138-146).

In response, civil society groups, NGOs, and advocacy networks, including the Indonesian Farmers Union (SPI) and La Via Campesina, promote food sovereignty as an alternative to the dominant food security narrative. Unlike the state's version of food sovereignty, which

aligns with national self-sufficiency, this approach emphasizes the right to culturally appropriate, locally produced food systems free from international market pressures. Food sovereignty advocates for smaller-scale, community-based agriculture that respects indigenous knowledge and promotes ecological balance (Serikat Petani Indonesia 2021; Via Campesnia 2022). Although this perspective has not yet gained significant media visibility, it holds potential as a counter-narrative, especially as food estate projects remain central to Indonesia's national agenda on food self-sufficiency. Strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission's authority to review plantation licenses could further reveal biases favouring corporate agriculture, paving the way for a more equitable and sustainable food security model. By advocating for food sovereignty, these groups present a counter-narrative that prioritizes local empowerment, environmental respect, and social justice, challenging MIFEE's profit-driven, state-led approach.

Merauke has once again become the focus of food estate development, despite the failure and eventual abandonment of the MIFEE project. President Jokowi's 2020 plan for this initiative began to materialize by late 2023, with the Merauke Food Estate designated as a National Strategic Program (PSN). This initiative is now set to continue under the newly elected President Prabowo Subianto. However, the government appears to be repeating past mistakes, launching yet another large-scale agricultural initiative despite the failures of previous food estate projects, such as MIFEE and similar programs in Kalimantan, which reportedly led to hunger and environmental destruction (Arif & Dionisius, 2022). This ongoing reliance on large-scale agriculture highlights the need for a well-prepared and specific counter-narrative that challenges its viability. I advocate for promoting small-scale, community-based agriculture that respects indigenous knowledge and prioritizes

environmental sustainability (Neilson, 2019; Arif, 2021). By integrating local dietary practices and traditional farming methods, food sovereignty offers a path to building resilient and self-reliant food systems that align with the cultural and environmental contexts of local communities (Dwiartama et al., 2023). Such an approach not only empowers local communities and preserves biodiversity but also fosters sustainable development, providing a more equitable and effective alternative to large-scale agricultural models (Klausen, 2020).

The repeated failures of large-scale agricultural projects like MIFEE highlight the need to rethink Indonesia's approach to food security. While these initiatives are framed as essential for self-sufficiency and national progress, their social, environmental, and cultural costs demonstrate their unsuitability for Indonesia's diverse contexts. Food sovereignty offers a viable alternative, emphasizing local farming practices, ecological balance, and the empowerment of indigenous communities. By prioritizing community-based agriculture and traditional food systems, Indonesia can build a more resilient and sustainable food security model that respects its cultural and environmental diversity. A shift toward this inclusive framework is essential for addressing past failures and creating a just and sustainable future for the nation's food systems.

## CHAPTER 5. REFLECTION

The application of Bacchi's WPR framework (2009) provided a systematic and rigorous approach to critically analysing Indonesia's food estate policies, uncovering the construction of food security narratives. While the reliance on secondary data was necessitated by logistical constraints, it limited the inclusion of firsthand perspectives, particularly from Indigenous communities directly affected by the MIFEE. Nonetheless, this methodological approach facilitated a comprehensive and timely analysis, ensuring the critique remained grounded in scholarly rigor. This study provided valuable insights into how food security is framed by the Indonesian government. Policies prioritize food self-sufficiency and national sovereignty while often marginalizing local needs and ecological sustainability (Neilson & Wright 2017). Large-scale agricultural initiatives, such as MIFEE, frequently disrupt Indigenous food systems and exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly for marginalized communities (Ito et. al 2014). These findings underscore the necessity of rethinking current approaches to food security, advocating for inclusive, community-centric models that prioritize local empowerment and sustainable practices. This research also reinforced the importance of critical self-reflection, aligning with Bacchi's (2018) call for self-problematization to scrutinize underlying assumptions in policy proposals. As a researcher, this process deepened my commitment to transparency, ethical engagement, and advancing justice-focused discourses in policy analysis.

### ***Future Research***

Future research should compare MIFEE with similar food estate projects across Indonesia to understand broader patterns. Field-based investigations capturing the lived experiences of Indigenous communities would provide a richer, more grounded understanding of the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of such projects. Additionally, exploring alternative models that integrate Indigenous practices and sustainability principles could offer practical solutions to address systemic issues in food security policy (Bastian & Coveney 2013; Arif 2021).

At the time of writing this thesis, Indonesia continues to pursue large-scale agricultural models as a strategy for achieving food security. Under President-elect Prabowo Subianto, the Merauke Food Estate has been prioritized as part of the National Strategic Program (Program Strategis Nasional - PSN). However, preliminary observations suggest parallels with the MIFEE project, particularly regarding inadequate feasibility studies, exclusion of local communities, and environmental degradation. These recurring issues highlight the pressing need to challenge the profit-driven, corporate-led framing of food security. The program formalized through Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Regulation No. 8/2023, which revised the National Strategic Projects list, the "Merauke Food and Energy Development Zone" was officially included as a PSN on November 10, 2023. The program encompasses three projects: land optimization expanding from 40,000 to 100,000 hectares, the establishment of sugarcane plantations, and rice field creation. The last two projects target a total of 2.29 million hectares in Merauke, aiming to achieve self-sufficiency in sugar and ethanol by 2028 and in rice by 2027. The first project focuses on

sugarcane plantation development over 1.11 million hectares in South Merauke. On April 19, 2024, President Jokowi solidified this initiative through Presidential Decree No. 15/2024 and Presidential Regulation No. 40/2023, appointing Minister of Investment Bahlil Lahadalia to oversee the program (Hidayat, 2024a; Tempo, 2024).

The second project involves the creation of rice fields over 1.18 million hectares in North Merauke, led by businessman Andi Syamsuddin Arsyad (Haji Isam) of Jhonlin Group in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture (Hidayat, 2024a; Tempo, 2024). Similar to MIFEE, this large-scale project raises two major concerns: the lack of feasibility studies despite its progress and the exclusion of local communities from the decision-making process, which has led to widespread opposition (Hermawan, 2024; Sutami, 2024). In July 2024, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry approved the use of 13,540 hectares of forest, followed by the arrival of heavy machinery in Wanam Port (Hidayat, 2024a; Hidayat, 2024c). Jhonlin Group has already begun constructing a 135.5 km road, prompting local protests, particularly from the Wanam community, who argue the project infringes on their customary land rights. On August 29, the Marind Indigenous leader Petrus Biluk publicly rejected the rice field and sugarcane plantation plans, stating, “This land belongs to the community, not the state” (Hidayat, 2024). Protests have also spread to Jakarta and Kalimantan, with activists and students highlighting concerns about environmental degradation and displacement (IDO, 2024; Manan, 2024).

Tensions have been exacerbated by the involvement of military personnel in securing the project area. Local leaders, such as Father Pius Cornelius Manu, criticized the military presence, stating that it has created an atmosphere of fear among the residents (Hidayat,

2024). Allegations of elite-driven interests further fuel skepticism, with figures such as Johanes Gluba Gebze, former regent of Merauke, reversing his stance to support land clearing for the project. Notably, Haji Isam, the primary businessman involved, is related to Minister of Agriculture Andi Amran Sulaiman, who was entrusted by Prabowo to lead the initiative (Hidayat, 2024c).

President-elect Prabowo Subianto, who previously spearheaded food security programs under President Jokowi, has confirmed his commitment to continuing the Merauke Food Estate initiative. On August 27, 2024, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani announced a budget allocation of Rp 124.4 trillion for the program, emphasizing its focus on developing new agricultural lands, irrigation systems, and national food reserves (Hidayat, 2024). Despite these ambitious plans, opposition from local communities, environmental concerns, and potential elite exploitation underscore the contentious nature of the project.

Given the ongoing efforts to achieve food security through food estate initiatives, this presents an opportunity to challenge the prevailing narrative of large-scale agricultural models with a more well-formulated counter-narrative. The dynamics of the MIFEE case, combined with increasing public awareness, underscore the potential of advocating for food sovereignty. This concept emphasizes local farming practices and the production of culturally appropriate foods rooted in local dietary traditions, offering a more sustainable and community-centred approach to food security. This aligns with Bacchi's final step (Step 7) of the WPR framework: self-problematization. This step involves scrutinizing one's own proposals and critically examining the assumptions and implications of the proposed alternative model (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2018, p. 20). Through this reflective process, the

narrative of food sovereignty can be rigorously assessed and refined, ensuring that it not only addresses the limitations of large-scale agriculture but also promotes a just and sustainable pathway to achieving food security in Indonesia.

### ***Limitations***

A notable limitation of this research is the absence of field-based primary data, which restricted the ability to capture the lived experiences of communities directly impacted by MIFEE. While secondary data provided a broad overview, it lacked the immediacy and depth that grassroots perspectives could offer (Johnston, 2014). Future studies should prioritize fieldwork to enrich the analysis and provide a more nuanced understanding of the local realities of food estate policies.

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