

## Politics of Identity in the Anime *One Piece* by Eiichiro Oda and Its Relevance to Indonesia's Socio-Political Dynamics

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### Abstract

This article explores how political identity is represented and developed in the anime *One Piece*, and how these representations resonate with contemporary socio-political conditions in Indonesia. Rather than treating anime merely as popular entertainment, this study approaches *One Piece* as a cultural narrative that reflects experiences of domination, collective trauma, and resistance. The analysis focuses primarily on the Alabasta, Fish-Man Island, Water Seven–Enies Lobby, and Wano arcs, which are widely recognized as moments where political tension and identity formation are most visible. Through qualitative narrative and semiotic analysis, the article identifies three recurring processes: the formation of identity through historical grievance, the role of solidarity (*asabiyyah*) in sustaining resistance, and the use of symbols to challenge dominant political narratives. These processes show notable parallels with identity politics in Indonesia, particularly in contexts shaped by inequality, memory of past repression, and struggles over legitimacy. This study argues that *One Piece* provides a meaningful cultural framework through which political identity can be interpreted beyond formal political institutions.

### Keywords:

anime studies; ibn khaldun; indonesia politics; *one piece*; political identity; popular culture

### Introduction

Anime has increasingly been recognized as a cultural medium that extends beyond entertainment and functions as a site for social and political meaning. As part of popular culture, anime often reflects tensions related to power, inequality, authority, and collective struggle, allowing audiences to engage with political ideas in indirect but influential ways (Allison, 2006; Iwabuchi, 2002). Among contemporary anime works, *One Piece* by Eiichiro Oda stands out as a long-running series that consistently portrays conflicts between state authority, elite domination, and marginalized communities.

Throughout its narrative, *One Piece* presents political power as contested rather than neutral. The World Government is depicted as an institution that regulates knowledge, defines legality, and determines which individuals or groups are considered legitimate or dangerous. These dynamics appear repeatedly across major arcs such as Alabasta, Water Seven, Enies Lobby, Fish Man Island, and Wano. Instead of portraying political order as stable, the series highlights how authority is maintained through repression, narrative control, and the suppression of historical memory. As a result, political identity within the story emerges not as an inherent characteristic, but as a response to unequal power relations and lived experiences of domination.



Existing scholarship has examined *One Piece* primarily through the lens of political critique, focusing on themes such as authoritarianism, propaganda, and structural inequality (Napier, 2018; Lamarre, 2018; Zoth, 2020). While these studies provide valuable insights into the institutional dimensions of power in the series, less attention has been given to the process through which political identity is formed among characters and communities. From the author's perspective, this represents an important gap, as political identity often serves as the foundation for collective mobilization, resistance, and moral solidarity.

The question of political identity becomes particularly relevant when considered in relation to Indonesia's contemporary socio-political context. Indonesia's political landscape continues to be shaped by contested historical narratives, unresolved memories of authoritarian rule, and ongoing struggles over legitimacy and inclusion (Mahdi, 2015). Although democratic reforms have expanded political participation, experiences of marginalization and unequal access to power remain influential in shaping how individuals and groups understand their political position. In this sense, political identity in Indonesia is frequently negotiated through narratives of history, symbolism, and collective experience rather than through formal political institutions alone.

At the same time, anime has become a widely consumed cultural reference among Indonesian audiences, especially among younger generations. Through repeated exposure to narratives of injustice, resistance, and moral struggle, anime contributes to the broader cultural environment in which political imagination develops (Yamane, 2020). While this does not imply a direct causal relationship between anime consumption and political behavior, it suggests that cultural texts such as *One Piece* can function as informal spaces where ideas about power, authority, and identity are encountered and interpreted.

Based on these considerations, this article examines how political identity is constructed in *One Piece* through narrative structure and symbolic representation. Rather than drawing direct parallels between fiction and reality, the analysis offers a conceptual reading that highlights shared patterns of identity formation in contexts marked by inequality, historical memory, and contested legitimacy. By situating *One Piece* within broader discussions of political identity and popular culture, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how cultural narratives participate in shaping political meaning beyond formal political discourse.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive approach that focuses on narrative and symbolic analysis. The method is chosen because the objective of the research is not to measure causal relationships or audience responses, but to examine how political identity is constructed through stories, symbols, and representations within the narrative of *One Piece*.

The primary material of the study consists of selected arcs of *One Piece*, namely Alabasta, Water Seven and Enies Lobby, Fish Man Island, and Wano. These arcs are selected based on the author's assessment that they most clearly illustrate moments of political tension, institutional conflict, and identity formation. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the selection prioritizes analytical relevance to the research focus.

Secondary sources include academic books, journal articles, and theses published between 2013 and 2025 that address anime studies, political identity, and narrative or semiotic analysis. The literature is used not as a fixed analytical template, but as a conceptual guide to situate the interpretation within existing scholarly discussions.

The analysis proceeds through close reading of narrative elements such as characters, institutions, symbols, dialogue, and key events related to power relations. These elements are

examined to identify recurring patterns associated with domination, narrative control, and resistance. Interpretation is developed iteratively, allowing themes to emerge through repeated engagement with the text rather than through predetermined coding categories.

To strengthen analytical validity, the interpretations are examined in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives, including semiotic analysis and political identity theory. This process allows the analysis to remain conceptually grounded while retaining interpretive flexibility. Rather than claiming definitive conclusions, the method emphasizes transparency in how interpretations are produced.

## Results and Discussion

This section is organized thematically based on the author's close reading of several key arcs in *One Piece*, rather than following the chronological order of the narrative. This approach is chosen because the focus of the study lies in understanding how political identity is constructed through recurring patterns of power relations, narrative control, and resistance, rather than in retelling the storyline. By adopting a thematic structure, the discussion highlights conceptual continuities that appear across different arcs, allowing the analysis to move beyond descriptive accounts toward a more interpretive examination of political meaning.

### A. Political Identity in *One Piece*

Political identity in *One Piece* is not portrayed as a fixed attribute attached to specific characters or social groups. Instead, it emerges as a dynamic process shaped by experiences of power, exclusion, and collective memory. Rather than presenting identity as a personal choice or ideological position, the narrative emphasizes how political consciousness develops in response to structural conditions imposed by authority. This approach allows *One Piece* to explore political identity as something that is produced through lived experience within unequal systems of power.

One of the most prominent mechanisms through which political identity is constructed in *One Piece* is oppression. Across multiple arcs, individuals and communities become politically aware not because they initially seek confrontation with authority, but because they are forced into political positions through repression. The case of Nico Robin illustrates this process clearly. Her identity as a criminal is not the result of political action, but of her association with forbidden historical knowledge. By labeling her as a threat from childhood, the World Government effectively constructs her political identity through exclusion. This reflects broader arguments in political theory that identity often emerges from processes of marginalization, where power defines who belongs and who must be controlled (Brubaker, 2004).

In addition to direct repression, political identity in *One Piece* is shaped through narrative control and propaganda. The Alabasta arc demonstrates how public perception can be manipulated to redirect political anger away from those in power. By spreading false narratives that blame the ruling monarchy for social suffering, the antagonists are able to mobilize popular resentment without addressing the structural causes of inequality. As a result, the population's political identity is temporarily constructed around misinformation rather than political awareness. This dynamic reflects how political identity can be engineered through discourse, where repeated narratives shape collective attitudes more effectively than lived reality (Laclau, 2005).

Another important dimension of political identity formation in *One Piece* is the role of historical memory. The suppression of the Void Century and the prohibition of Poneglyphs

demonstrate how control over history becomes a political strategy. By restricting access to historical knowledge, the World Government limits the possibility of alternative political identities that challenge its legitimacy. Communities that encounter fragments of suppressed history often experience a shift in political consciousness, recognizing their position within a longer trajectory of domination. This relationship between memory and identity aligns with scholarly arguments that collective memory plays a crucial role in shaping political belonging and resistance (Assmann, 2011).

Political identity in *One Piece* also develops through collective experience rather than individual ideology. In the Water Seven and Enies Lobby arcs, resistance emerges not from abstract political principles, but from shared emotional experiences such as betrayal, loss, and moral outrage. The Straw Hat crew's confrontation with the World Government is driven by personal loyalty and solidarity rather than a coherent political program. However, these affective bonds gradually evolve into a broader political stance against institutional injustice. This suggests that political identity can originate from interpersonal relationships and emotional attachment before becoming articulated as resistance to structural power (Melucci, 1996).

The Wano arc further expands this understanding by illustrating how political identity can be sustained through cultural continuity. In Wano, resistance is deeply rooted in shared traditions, inherited narratives, and moral obligations to previous generations. Political identity here is not only reactive but also preservative, aiming to protect cultural integrity against external domination. This form of identity highlights how culture and history can provide durable foundations for political resistance, particularly in societies that experience long-term oppression.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that *One Piece* conceptualizes political identity as a relational and evolving process. Identity is shaped through interactions between authority, historical memory, narrative control, and collective experience rather than through formal political ideology. By portraying political identity in this way, *One Piece* avoids simplistic moral binaries and instead presents a nuanced understanding of how individuals and communities come to see themselves politically within unequal systems of power. This perspective provides a valuable framework for examining political identity not only within fictional narratives, but also within real-world contexts marked by domination, resistance, and contested legitimacy.

## B. Symbolism of Power, Oppression, and Resistance

Symbols play an important role in shaping political meaning in *One Piece*. Rather than conveying political ideas explicitly, the series relies on recurring visual and narrative symbols to structure how authority and resistance are understood. As noted in semiotic studies, symbols often function to naturalize power relations by embedding ideology into everyday representations (Barthes, 1972). Based on the author's reading, symbolism in *One Piece* operates as a key mechanism through which political identity is interpreted and negotiated.

One of the most striking symbols is the Gate of Justice, which represents the absolute authority of the World Government. Its massive scale and irreversible structure convey the idea that state power is distant, final, and beyond contestation. The symbol works affectively by producing fear and resignation rather than consent. In this way, the Gate of Justice reinforces obedience through spectacle and spatial dominance.

In contrast, the Straw Hat flag represents a different source of political legitimacy. While it initially functions as a marker of group identity among the Straw Hat crew, it gradually becomes a symbol of solidarity for oppressed communities. The flag does not derive its

authority from law or coercion, but from shared moral recognition. Through collective acceptance, it enables the formation of an alternative political identity grounded in trust and mutual protection, rather than institutional power.

Spatial and material symbols further reinforce political hierarchy in the narrative. Mariejois, positioned physically above the rest of the world, materializes elite privilege and inherited authority. Meanwhile, the Poneglyphs symbolize suppressed historical knowledge. Their prohibition illustrates how control over memory and history becomes a strategy for maintaining political dominance and silencing alternative interpretations (Zoth, 2020).

To summarize how these symbolic elements function politically, Table 1 presents the author's analytical synthesis of key symbols in *One Piece*. The table highlights recurring symbolic patterns that contribute to the construction of authority and resistance within the narrative.

**Table 1.** Symbolic Patterns of Power, Oppression, and Resistance in One Piece

Symbol	Political Meaning	Function in Identity Formation
Gate of Justice	Representation of absolute authority	Produces obedience through fear and spectacle
World Government Emblem	Symbol of ideological domination	Reinforces state legitimacy
Mariejois (Holy Land)	Spatial symbol of elite privilege	Naturalizes hierarchy
Poneglyphs	Suppressed historical memory	Shapes identity through knowledge exclusion
Straw Hat Flag	Symbol of moral resistance	Enables alternative political belonging

Source: Author's analytical synthesis based on Barthes (1972), Foucault (1977), Agamben (1998), Gramsci (1971), and Anderson (1983).

Following the table, it becomes clear that symbols in *One Piece* operate as interpretive anchors through which political identity is formed. Authority is sustained when symbols normalize inequality, while resistance emerges when alternative symbols circulate and gain collective recognition. This confirms that political identity in the series is shaped not only by narrative events, but also by ongoing struggles over meaning and representation.

### C. Relevance to Indonesia's Socio-Political Dynamics

The construction of political identity in *One Piece* offers a useful conceptual lens for understanding contemporary socio-political dynamics in Indonesia, particularly in relation to power, memory, and legitimacy. Rather than functioning as a direct political analogy, the series provides symbolic patterns that resonate with broader experiences of governance, inequality, and resistance that have shaped Indonesia's political history.

One of the most relevant aspects concerns the relationship between state authority and historical memory. In *One Piece*, the suppression of historical knowledge through the prohibition of the Poneglyphs demonstrates how control over the past becomes a strategy for maintaining political dominance. A similar dynamic can be observed in Indonesia, where narratives of national history have long been contested and selectively institutionalized, particularly in relation to periods of authoritarian rule. The regulation of historical discourse

has contributed to the formation of political identities that are shaped not only by lived experience, but also by officially sanctioned interpretations of the past (Mahdi, 2015).

Political identity in Indonesia has also been influenced by the lingering effects of centralized power and hierarchical governance. Although Indonesia has undergone significant democratic reforms since the end of the New Order, patterns of elite domination and unequal access to political resources remain visible. In this context, political identity is often formed through experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and uneven development. This mirrors the narrative logic in *One Piece*, where political consciousness frequently emerges among communities that experience systemic neglect or repression rather than among those who benefit from existing power structures.

Another important point of resonance lies in the role of symbols and collective imagination. As demonstrated in *One Piece*, symbols such as flags, emblems, and spatial hierarchies play a crucial role in shaping political belonging and moral legitimacy. In Indonesia, political identity is similarly mediated through symbolic practices, including national symbols, religious imagery, and cultural narratives that are mobilized during moments of political contestation. These symbols do not merely represent identity; they actively produce it by defining who belongs, who is excluded, and whose claims are considered legitimate (Sulfan & Mukhsin, 2021).

The popularity of anime among Indonesian youth further strengthens the relevance of this analysis. Anime functions as an informal cultural space where political ideas are encountered outside formal institutions such as schools or political organizations. Through repeated exposure to narratives of resistance, injustice, and moral solidarity, audiences may internalize certain frameworks for understanding power and authority. While this does not imply direct political influence, it suggests that cultural texts like *One Piece* contribute to the broader environment in which political identities are imagined and negotiated (Yamane, 2020).

Importantly, the relevance of *One Piece* to Indonesia's socio-political context should not be overstated. The series does not offer concrete solutions to Indonesia's political challenges, nor does it function as a blueprint for resistance. Instead, its value lies in its capacity to illustrate how political identity is shaped through narrative, symbolism, and shared experience. By presenting power as contingent and legitimacy as contestable, *One Piece* encourages a critical orientation toward authority that resonates with democratic aspirations in post-authoritarian societies.

In this sense, the analysis of *One Piece* contributes to a broader understanding of political identity formation in contemporary Indonesia. It highlights how identity is not simply inherited or imposed, but continuously constructed through interactions between history, power, and cultural representation. This perspective underscores the importance of cultural texts as sites of political meaning-making, particularly in societies where formal political participation is often accompanied by deep structural inequalities.

## Conclusion

This article has explored the construction of political identity in *One Piece* through narrative, symbolism, and experiences of power and resistance. The analysis shows that political identity in the series is not presented as a fixed category, but as a process shaped by domination, historical memory, and collective meaning-making.

Across different narrative arcs, political consciousness emerges through lived experiences of repression, exclusion, and narrative control rather than through ideological instruction. Institutions such as the World Government define legitimacy by regulating

knowledge and history, while alternative political identities develop through shared suffering, moral solidarity, and resistance to imposed narratives.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in this process. Elements such as the Gate of Justice, Mariejois, the Poneglyphs, and the Straw Hat flag function as interpretive frameworks through which authority and resistance are understood. These symbols actively shape how political positions are perceived, making symbolism inseparable from political identity formation within the narrative.

The relevance of this analysis to Indonesia lies in its conceptual contribution. In a post-authoritarian context marked by contested memory and hierarchical power relations, political identity in Indonesia continues to be negotiated through narratives, symbols, and struggles over legitimacy. *One Piece* offers a cultural lens that resonates with these dynamics, particularly among younger audiences who engage with popular culture as a space of political imagination.

Rather than offering direct political prescriptions, this study highlights the importance of cultural texts in understanding how political meanings are produced beyond formal institutions. By treating anime as a serious object of political analysis, the article emphasizes that political identity is continuously constructed through interactions between power, history, and symbolic representation.

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