

# From Collective Identity to Counter-Hegemony: A Representation of the Political Logic of Papuan Voices Cultural Activism

Handrianus Koli Belolon<sup>1</sup>

Received: December 27<sup>th</sup> 2023 | Accepted: April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2024 | Published: April 25<sup>th</sup> 2024

## Abstract

*In mass media, such as films, the Papuan region and people are still regarded as “the other”, for example, portrayed as a people and region that needs to be civilized through various approaches. In addition, Papua is rich in natural wealth and culture, but instead of bringing prosperity, it become a source of new conflicts that threaten the existence and survival of the environment and the Papuan. This condition encourages young Papuan filmmakers and members of the Papuan Voices (PV) community to create an alternative narrative about Papua. Through documentaries produced collectively, they aim to present another side of Papua from the perspective of the Papuans. Using a poststructuralism approach elaborated with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this study aims to explore the dynamics of collective identity formation and efforts to create counter-narratives as part of a counter-hegemony movement, namely by criticizing inequality and instilling solidarity for Papua. The analysis shows that the formation of PV's collective identity is based on the history of Papuan suffering memories (memoria passionis) related to the experiences of injustice.*

**Keywords:** *Papuan Voices, Cultural Movement, Collective Identity, Counter-Hegemony*

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Anthropology, Okmin Papua University. Email: hardybaslon@gmail.com



## Introduction

Discussing Papua<sup>2</sup> in socio-cultural and political contexts cannot be separated from two contradictory perspectives. On the one hand, Papua is viewed as an economically important enclave that can increase economic growth; on the other, Papua is the “other” Indonesia, as the general public perceives the identity and way of life of indigenous Papuans to be “different” than theirs (the majority). These two perspectives have existed since colonial times<sup>3</sup> and continue to prevail today as part of

dichotomous reasoning about Papua, especially perpetuated by the mass media.

As I Ngurah Suryawan argued, Indonesia places Papuans as a group with no culture, or even if they do have one, the degree is lower than the culture of other regions. Moreover, the struggle of the Papuans fighting for their basic rights remains fruitless (Suryawan, 2011: 297). The movements made by the Papuan civil resistance are often considered separatist movements that potentially threaten the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Related to that, Elvira Rumkabu maintains that the separatist attribute attached to Papuans, as demonstrated by Jakarta politicians and many national media, is an oversimplification of the complexity of the problems in Papua. Separatism is used to justify the state’s security approaches to the increasingly

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term “Papua” refers to both the indigenous people and nature, which are often subjected to discriminatory and exploitative practices

<sup>3</sup> Agus Alua in *Papua Barat dari Pangkuan ke Pangkuan: Suatu Ikhtiar Kronologis* (2006) notes that the injustice in Papua has existed since the Dutch colonial era (1875-1944). The colonists claimed to be a “first class” group with more power and knowledge and the Papuan was seen as the “third class” group in the social and political strata. These categories became the basis for the Dutch to control the Papuans. As a result, the Papuans were alienated on their own land (Alua, 2006: 35).



strengthening civil resistance movement in Papua, when in fact, the civil resistance is part of a campaign to voice the rights of the indigenous peoples and reject deforestation, militarism, and the existence of corporations and state policies that increasingly corner the indigenous Papuans.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the narratives in national media is more like a political imaging tool to construct the image of government's success in developing Papua.<sup>5</sup>

By obscuring the complexity of problems, the mainstream mass media actually creates disinformation about Papua in a

discriminatory and colonialist manner.

Quoting Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, mass media is a device of hegemony,<sup>6</sup> as well as a medium of interpellation<sup>7</sup> used by the regime's apparatus to create consensus and relations of agreement in society (Patria & Arief, 1999: 126-127). Thus, the mass media not only informs but

<sup>6</sup> Before Gramsci, the term 'hegemony' was limited to the meaning of the domination of one state over another. Due to the influence of Gramsci's writing, hegemony is now used to describe the intricacies of power relations in literature, education, film and cultural studies to political science, history and international relations. In this case, hegemony is redefined as the establishment and organization of consent (Ives, 2004: 2; Simon, 2004: 19).

<sup>7</sup> Louis Althusser in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essay* (1971: 127-187), explained that within the framework of social formation, social order and relations in society need to be formed by instilling ideology in each individual. In this case, the ideological state apparatus, such as religion, education, and mass media, is used to bring public awareness so the narratives can be accepted and justified, even though they are inversely proportional to reality. This process is referred to as the media's attempt to interpellate the masses in order to become "ideal" citizens according to the ideals of the regime apparatus. (See also <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>)

<sup>4</sup> See <https://tirto.id/nkri-harga-mati-operasi-militer-bukan-solusi-masalah-papua-dcCK>

<sup>5</sup> See Dana Otsus Mampu Tingkatkan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Papua - Nasional Tempo.co (Accessed December 11, 2023); Luhut Tawarkan Investasi Hijau di Papua Kepada 24 Perusahaan (cnnindonesia.com) (Accessed December 11, 2023); Membasmi Separatisme (mediaindonesia.com) (Accessed December 11, 2023); also Kegiatan Seru TNI di Balik Pengerjaan Proyek Trans Papua - YouTube (Accessed December 11, 2023)



also interprets something through certain narratives and framing. This mass media's interpretation and information can shape the public's perceptions, assumptions, and subjective understandings.

Fighting the common misconception, young Papuan filmmakers and members of Papuan Voices (PV) seek to produce alternative narratives about Papua through documentary films as a means of advocacy and media campaigns at the local, national, and global levels. In addition, PV also provides a forum to form a collective identity and a platform to send a message about the discrimination and injustice experienced by the Papuans. According to Pamungkas & Yayusman (2023), PV is an example of how indigenous Papuans resist the state's hegemony through mass media

as and build justice and peace in Papua.

PV and its activism are an interesting phenomenon to be studied as a cultural product connected with the politics of social movements in the Marxist tradition. Therefore, using a poststructuralism approach, elaborated with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this study aims to explore the dynamics of collective identity formation and efforts to create counter-narratives as part of the counter-hegemony movement, namely by criticizing inequality and instilling solidarity for Papua.

This paper consists of three main components of PV's cultural activism. The first is the framing of news about Papua in mainstream media, such as feature films and online media, which also becomes the background for the birth of PV and its activism. The second is PV as a collective identity,



which is established and grows from the history of the memory of suffering (*memoria passionis*) and various demands and collective wills moving towards universal will and demands for Papuan narratives. The third is the movement to build a counter-hegemony narrative through documentary films to contest meanings and build democracy for Papua's nature and people.

### **Papua in the Mass Media Frame**

In an article entitled *Another East: Representation of Papua in Popular Media*, Anggraeni (2011) explained that the image of Papua in the eyes of the public today cannot be separated from the construction of mass media. Based on her analyses of several media outlets, such as the novels *Namaku Teweraut* (2000), *Tanah Tabu* (2008), and the film *Denias: Senandung di Atas Awan* (2006), she found that narratives about Papua created by people from

outside Papua that contain stereotypes, such as Papuans as a backward group. Although these three media products have tried to represent the voices of indigenous Papuans, the pattern of constructing the image of the indigenous people contains fundamental differences compared to the image of other Indonesian groups, which are considered more advanced and "modern". It is as if the problem of Papua will never be resolved unless the basic problem of its "backwardness" is resolved, referring to the life of Papuan inland tribes that have not been touched by modern civilization.

In addition to the narrative in those three films, the problematic and discriminatory image construction of Papua can also be found in the films *Lost in Papua* (2011) and *Di Timur Matahari* (2012). Not much different from *Denias*, both films also fail to authentically narrate



Papua and its socio-cultural conditions. Instead of describing the problem of education in Papua and cultural practices that are considered not to uphold human values, the two films actually reinforce negative assumptions and stigmas about indigenous Papuans and their sociocultural life.

In those movies, Papuans are described as a group of people whose mindset is not yet advanced, cannibalistic, warlike, and primitive. As depicted in these films, one alternative solution offered for progress in Papua is to bring in “experts” from outside to “help” them in various sectors, such as teachers, doctors, pastors, or security forces. Papuan children must go to school and live outside Papua so that their behavior and mindset can progress and develop. In short, the narrative in these films is morally and socio-culturally

flawed because it legalizes the understanding and practice of subordination and inferiority to humans and culture.

What Gramsci has argued is relevant here. Films are an ideological device for the state and the general public to legitimize and perpetuate subordination and discrimination. The audience, with their limited background on the subject matter in the movie, is led to accept the message conveyed as neutral information. Without criticality, it is easy for them to accept the narrative as the truth. Indeed, films are a powerful tool in constructing human consciousness to help justify the narrative. This is accomplished using a persuasive approach to build a relationship of agreement (Patria & Arief, 1999: 126-127).

The consensus or consent relationship that people receive is passive because the information



and knowledge are not their own but a construction of human false consciousness. This is how cultural hegemony works, which aims to lead public opinion in seeing Papuan nature and people from the perspective of a storyteller. According to Gramsci, this is due to the absence of a critical conceptual basis in people's minds so that they cannot understand social reality fully. The only source of society's critical attitude lies in what Gramsci called "good sense" as opposed to "common sense", which is two theoretical consciousness<sup>8</sup> (Saukko, 2003: 21).

---

<sup>8</sup> According to Gramsci, "theoretical consciousness" is a force to liberate individuals from the ideological dominance of the ruling class in society. Theoretical consciousness involves a critical understanding of power structures and transformative actions to bring about social change. He emphasized the importance of expanding theoretical consciousness among the working class and oppressed groups within a capitalist society. The revolutionary power to transform society could only be realized if these individuals clearly understood their conditions and acted together to change them (Gramsci, 1971).

Under these conditions, Gramsci argues the importance of forming a historical bloc and raising organic intellectual figures to perform counter-hegemony or counter-narratives to reach consensus among the public. In this way, critical awareness (good sense) can be achieved because the agents are qualified to narrate Papua authentically and fight for the rights of indigenous Papuans.

### **Papuan Voices as Collective Identity**

In the study of social movements, the formation of a hegemonic social formation is inseparable from the entire process of forming a collective identity. The identity is not born spontaneously or as a consequence of the ideological pressure of the ruling class, but it is born from the political work of the mobilizing actors. In Gramsci's language, actors who carry out political work of



leadership are “organic intellectuals”<sup>9</sup> who carry out intellectual and moral reforms in society as a prerequisite for the formation of a hegemonic, collective identity. Only in this way, civic organizations and their activism can be instilled in society and will be increasingly hegemonic (Simon, 2004: 84-91).

Complementing Gramsci's views, Laclau, inspired by Rosa Luxemburg, argued that collective identity is born from collective wills. The particularity of the demands and wills of each

social agent is placed in a broader context to find a universality of wills and demands. It is this dimension of universality that inspired the hegemonic movement. To achieve collective identity, two factors are needed: a chain of equivalence and a political frontier that becomes an internal unifier and an external differentiator (Butler et al., 2000: 301-302).

In the context of PV as an association of young Papuan filmmakers, the dynamics of collective identity formation can be traced through the collective wills. Individuals or groups involved in PV activism are those who have the desire to be morally and ethically responsible in voicing messages from Papua to the wider community. They come from various communities and civil organizations in Papua, such as GEMPAR (Youth and People's Student Movement) Papua,

<sup>9</sup> According to Gramsci, “organic intellectuals” are actually grassroots people born from situations of oppression and speak out on the basis of their experience of oppression by using languages that can be understood by people from the same social circle. Organic intellectuals are not characterized by the intrinsic thinking activity possessed by all people, but by the function they carry out as organizers in the social, political and cultural fields, where they relate abstract ideas to their social reality. They can feel emotions, enthusiasm and what is experienced by society and use cultural language to express feelings and experiences that cannot be expressed by society. In short, Gramsci asserted that all people are intellectuals, but not everyone has an intellectual function (Simon, 2004: 141; Gramsci, 1971: 9; Jones, 2006: 85).





PAPEDA (Papua Peace Addicts), JERAT (People's Network) Papua, BELANTARA (Inter-People Learning Workshop) Papua, SKPKC (Secretariat for Justice of Peace and Integrity of Creation), Papuansphoto, WPU (West Papua Update), journalists, women activists, environmental activists, as well as youth and indigenous peoples.

Of course, each joins PV with various individual and collective wills and demands from their respective communities. So, how does PV accommodate differences to reach a single goal and a collective identity?

One characteristic of the PV movement is the transformation of critical consciousness by upholding human rights. Each PV member consciously manifests these traits in thoughts and actions that respect equality and diversity and reject violence, exploitation, and injustice, especially to women and other

marginalized groups. PV activism prioritizes respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity, religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation.

Differences in views and opinions are allowed to bind each member without exception. Complaints and demands raised are usually related to nature and the people of Papua. They are conveyed properly by considering human values that are inherent intellectually, morally, and ethically. The collective will to present counter-narratives in the name of Papuan people departs from a shared awareness of the experience of injustice that occurs in Papua and the mainstream narratives that are not in accordance with the historical, social conditions of the indigenous Papuans.

According to PV's General Coordinator, Bernard Koten, this is the reason why PV claims that the narratives filmed belong to



Papuans, and Papuans' voices filmed belong to PV. There is an inseparable unity between PV as the voice of the Papuans and the Papuans as the main characters in films. PV is the voice of the Papuans, and the voice of the Papuans is the voice of PV.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, PV continuously transforms the critical consciousness (intellectual and moral) of its members through training and capacity building in the audio-visual field to unite the wills. PV's regular agenda to garner consensus include developing planning strategies, research and investigation methods, workshops on themes relevant to the context of Papuan life, watching and discussing films, and the annual Papua Film Festival (FFP). In addition to improving technical skills to documentaries, these activities aim to raise critical awareness of PV members to continue to

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Bernard Koten in Jayapura on July 30, 2019.

reflect Papuans' aspirations in the films' narratives.

The cultural movement<sup>11</sup> to form a collective identity is necessary to distinguish a group from others or external institutions. Unlike the various groups and individuals outside PV, each PV member was born and grew up with the joys and sorrows of the Papuans. Therefore, the narrative built also departs from their daily experience. They are Papuans who come, gather, and move in the name of the will to voice the story from Papua, demanding the fulfillment of the rights and

<sup>11</sup>Understanding the terminology of the "Cultural Movement" from a cultural studies perspective cannot be separated from the concept of 'culture' conceptualized by Raymond Williams. According to him, during the 19th century, the definition of culture was more anthropological in nature, describing culture as a whole and distinctive way of life with an emphasis on life experience. Culture is also related to art as well as values (abstract ideas), norms (principles or rules) and material objects and symbols of everyday life. In short, culture is everyday meaning that can be found from ordinary things in the daily lives of all people, as well as in every thought (Williams, 1989: 4)



respect for Papua, which has been subjected to capitalism, militarism, subordination, marginalization and stigmatization.

In short, the collective identity built by PV is not based on concrete identities such as workers, women, neighborhoods, or ethnicities but on the voices of Papuans collectively. Quoting Suryawan (2011: 297), the history of the memory of the suffering (*memoria passionis*) of the Papuans is the most powerful binder of the wills and demands of PV members to fight against injustice in Papua. It is an internal unifier and an external distinction from non-Papuan voices.

PV activism can be defined as a New Social Movement, which sees cultural movements as networks or elaborative informal interactions among a plurality of individuals, groups, or organizations involved in a political or cultural conflict

(Melucci, 1989: 29). PV is one part of the socio-cultural and political force that fights the antagonistic position to win the sympathy and consensus of the wider community.

In this context, the struggle for a position is part of the antagonism that forms collective identity in a historical bloc. Antagonism is not an objective relationship but a relationship where the limits of objectivity become visible, an area that determines the boundaries of collective identity from something outside itself (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: xiii-xiv). In short, antagonistic relationships play an important role in the formation of collective identity and counter-hegemony because the creation of a social antagonism includes the creation of a common enemy, which is important for forming the political boundaries of



a collective identity (Hutagalung, 2006: 12).

### **Contestation of the Meaning and Struggle of Popular Democracy as a Counter-Hegemony**

In a discussion with Helena Kobogau, PV Coordinator for the Timika region, she said that not all stories about Papua that have been widely circulated so far are in accordance with the facts in Papua. A number of development policies in Papua are also not oriented towards fulfilling the rights of indigenous Papuans. In addition, the public needs to know about the cries about investment opponents, militarism, discrimination, and various injustice phenomena experienced by Papuans. According to Kobogau, the aim of PV is to accommodate the neglected voices so that the truth can be revealed and the suffering

experiences of Papuans can be known to many people.<sup>12</sup>

On the same occasion, Otto Wanma, a PV member of the Tambraw region, also said that so far, there has been a lot of news about Papua, but it did not reflect indigenous Papuans. According to Wanma, PV is a forum for Papuans to tell the true reality of Papua to show that in Papua, there is no peace and justice.<sup>13</sup>

According to Wens Fatubun, an initiator of PV, the purpose of PV is simple, namely so that the wider community knows the difference between stories 'about' Papua and stories 'from' Papua.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, there have been many narratives 'about' Papua published, but not all of them are accurate information and knowledge. There are still many

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Helena Kobogau in Sorong on August 6, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Otto Wanma in Sorong on August 6, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Wens Fatubun in Sorong on August 9, 2019.



narratives that are twisted and bent.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, PV-produced documentaries become a tool for indigenous Papuans to tell stories, consolidate collective memory, support human rights advocacy and help heal trauma. Furthermore, PV films are useful in raising critical awareness of Papuans in relation to the outside world. It is time for the outside world to see Papua from the perspective of Papuans themselves because Papuans also have adequate capacity to narrate their life experiences without having to rely on others to speak (Fatubun, 2023).

The three statements to show PV's counter-hegemony that aims to: 1) reject all forms of

unrealistic twisting of the issue of Papua, 2) fill in the gaps of information and knowledge about Papua, which are rarely or never covered or exposed by mainstream national media, 3) present a new perspective in narrating Papua, where Papuans are the subject of narration, and 4) raise critical awareness for the community to participate in fighting for truth and fighting injustice in Papua.

In general, the dynamics of the cultural movement championed by PV depart from the antagonistic relationship in terms of cultural framing about Papua between stories 'about' Papua and stories 'from' Papua. The aim is to rally solidarity with Papua and organize a consensus on a realistic understanding of Papua. PV becomes the terrain for the formation of every subject of society into an agent of change in

---

<sup>15</sup> Misdirection of public opinion about Papua also occurs through subtle media propaganda. Based on the results of media searches by Tirto and Tabloid Jubi, it was found that there were around 18 media that spread hoaxes about Papua. For more information, see <https://jubi.co.id/hati-hati-netizen-kini-ada-18-media-siluman-di-papua/>, and <https://tirto.id/media-siluman-di-papua-propaganda-hoaks-hingga-narasumber-fiktif-da5B>



the practice of signification: Papuans tell stories.

### Reviewing Three Movies

To find new meanings PV produces through its documentary films, this section reviews three films, namely *Ironic Survival* (2011), *Love Letter to Sang Prada* (2012), and *Resep Pendidikan Papua* (2018). First, *Ironic Survival* (2011)<sup>16</sup> is a short documentary, with a duration of 05:46, that talks about the irony of life carried out by Alex Mahuze and his family in the Merauke region. Like other ethnic groups in the Papua region, sago, in the eyes of Alex's family, is a staple food of Papuans that should be maintained and preserved for their survival in the future. However, since the establishment of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) in the Merauke region in 2010, they have experienced many

obstacles in several aspects of life. The MIFEE program, which was launched to improve food security, was a disaster for Alex's family. Conservation forests with sago fields and various sources of living needs of Merauke people are converted into agricultural land oriented towards agribusiness interests. As a result, Alex's family life was shaken because of the loss of living spaces without any guarantees from the company or the government.

To survive, they have limited options, so they mine sand on the coast and then sell it for cash. This mining is ironic because the harmony of life that has existed between humans and nature in Papua for thousands of years must be destroyed so that they can survive. MIFEE has impoverished them, made them hungry, and forced them to destroy nature, which is the source of life from the past to the

<sup>16</sup>The film *Ironic Survival* (2011) can be accessed on <https://papuanvoices.net/2012/07/23/ironic-survival.html>



present and in the future. Urbanus Kiaf, as the director, has succeeded in making a framing that is contextual, relevant, and on target. This is a picture of the socio-historical conditions that really happen in Papua. There are so many development programs in Papua that are claimed to be able to improve the welfare of the community, but the fact is that Papuan people and nature are left with the crumbs of development projects on their customary land.

In other words, national development still departs from neoliberalism, which emphasizes privatization and economic growth. This has serious consequences, among others, the deposition of local communities on the one hand and the integration of local communities into the global market. Unfortunately, this kind of perspective tends to be absent in the coverage of the dominant mass media in Indonesia. Instead

of becoming voices of people's aspirations, the mainstream media is trapped in a regime apparatus tasked with strengthening the grip and hegemony of the state at the local level. In addition, the film also contains harsh criticism as well as a political message for the audience. Of course, Urbanus (the director) does not just want to show what problems Alex's family experiences but invites the audience to think hard about how to end the irony and how to treat nature as it should.

Second, *Love Letter to the Prada* (2012).<sup>17</sup> The short documentary film directed by Wenda Tokomonowir in collaboration with Engage Media and JPIC-MSC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation - Missionaries of the Sacred Heart) had become a hot topic of conversation because it

---

<sup>17</sup>The film *Love Letter to the Prada* (2012) can be accessed on <https://papaunvoices.net/2012/08/03/loveletter-to-the-soldier.html>

managed to uncover the human tragedy that befell a young girl named Maria Goreti Mekiw (Eti). This documentary tells the story of Eti's complicated life without the presence of a husband and father for her baby, Yani. In 2008, Eti is involved with a TNI soldier named Samsul, who is serving in Bupul Village, Papua, a village located in the border area of the Republic of Indonesia-Papua New Guinea. In Eti's eyes, Samsul is a kind, polite, and responsible person. Every time he visits her house, Samsul always brings biscuits, milk, rice, instant noodles, and canned fish, as well as clothes and bedding for her family. It seems that Samsul is good at persuasion, so Eti falls for him and even puts high trust in him that they will become husband and wife in the future. Unfortunately, Eti's love story with Samsul does not last long and ended in loneliness and deep disappointment. When Samsul's

term ends, he leaves Eti pregnant, and he does not keep his promise. Eti has written to Samsul twice but never receives any reply. Eti and Yani depend on their parents, who are growing older, while still waiting for good news to come.

Through Eti's story, Wenda wants to present a different and distinctive framing model about the life experience of Papuans in relation to militarism as a security approach. By placing Eti, a Papuan woman, as the subject of his story, Wenda opens a new veil, showing a dark side of militarism in Papua that is rarely presented by the mainstream media.

From this movie, we learn that militarism in Papua always leaves wounds in the Papuan mind. It is like a disaster that continues to erode the socio-cultural life of Papuans and foster acute social diseases. Through the packaging of such





documentary narratives, it is hoped that the Papuan public and people outside Papua will gain awareness about the threat to the survival of Papuans. It is time for the public to be critical of the outdated narratives of mainstream media while reflecting on stories 'from' Papua to find the most authentic truth.

The third movie is *Resep Pendidikan Papua* (2018)<sup>18</sup> by Yosep Levi. In the movie, Levi criticizes the poor education system in Papua. Levi shows that Papuan children have great potential in terms of knowledge to the figure of teacher Tri Ari Santi and her students at State Elementary School in Saminage, Yahukimo Regency. They can read, write, and count like students in other areas. It is just that they need more contextual education following their respective traditions and

cultures, where they live, and work in the future. If children and teachers are forced to comply with national curriculum standards, all efforts to increase the capacity of Papuan children will be in vain. They do not need the knowledge that has been standardized by the central government. The centralized model of education is not sensitive to the local context and daily life and eventually keeps them away from their own lives.

For Levi, education should be rooted in local traditions and culture fit within the context of their daily lives. Education also should not just be about school buildings with various models of learning devices determined by the national state. Education is about freedom of thought and expression. When education ignores these things, it will become a new world full of imagination about everything they have never encountered in

---

<sup>18</sup> The film *Resep Pendidikan Papua* (2018) can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRxBSO7IXxg>

the nature and culture of Papuans. As a result, knowledge will become something abstract and difficult to imagine and understand among the students. The hope is that the film will open the public's eyes to fight against the discourse and practice of education that is centric. The movie also aims to combat stigma about Papuans who are still considered 'backward' and 'other' that need to be civilized by those who claim to be more advanced in all aspects of life.

Based on a brief review of the three films, this paper aims to show that the framing method and film content packaged by PV filmmakers depart from the socio-historical conditions of Papuans. Substantially, the narrative packaging is also in stark contrast to the popular narratives in online media, television, feature films and stealth media. That is why PV filmmakers claim that

documentary is not only an art product, but also an ideological tool capable of raising critical awareness and garnering public consensus on a new meaning of Papua. In this condition, the new meaning of Papua is interpreted as a counter-narrative, which is the first step for PV to carry out *counter-hegemony*.

In this regard, Irene Fatagur, a member of PV for the Keerom region, testified that documentary films produced by PV members so far have been the most effective media for growing knowledge as well as raising critical awareness of indigenous Papuans; especially for those who are not familiar with the world of reading and writing. By watching these documentaries, a person or group of people can learn about the problems that are currently plaguing nature and fellow Papuan people from the perspective of Papuan filmmakers. By doing so, it is



hoped that a sense of solidarity will grow, which lead to the creation of grassroots power in thinking of solutions so that the same problems do not happen again in the future.<sup>19</sup>

On the same occasion, Monaliza Upuya also added about the importance of documentaries as part of non-violent resistance to reject stereotyping of the Papuans, such as separatists, backward, rebels, and other types of stigmatization, including government policies that are not in favor of preserving nature and the rights of life of indigenous Papuans. Furthermore, Upuya emphasized that Papuan people and nature are just as dignified as any other tribes and, therefore, need to be cared for and respected by everyone.<sup>20</sup> This finding is in line with Faye

Ginsburg's (1995) statement that globally, indigenous peoples have widely used several types of media, such as film and video, to communicate their struggle for the right to self-determination and as a tool to fight foreign cultural domination.

In addition to producing new meanings about Papua through documentaries, PV activists also carry out several activities in an effort to maintain the consistency of the counter-hegemony movement at the local, national, and global levels. The first is the regeneration of young Papuan filmmakers through workshops and exercises in producing documentary films in a number of PV work areas, such as Merauke, Sorong, Wamena, Biak, Timika, and Keerom. In each PV work area, there are also other routine agendas, such as watching and discussing films with indigenous peoples in nearby villages to be

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Irene Fatagur at the III Papua Film Festival in Sorong, 9 August 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Monaliza Upuya at the III Papua Film Festival in Sorong City, 9 August 2019.



able to formulate and map the basic problems that are plaguing Papua.

Not only that. PV also provides a special platform in the form of a website ([www.papuanvoices.net](http://www.papuanvoices.net)), YouTube account (Papuan Voices), as well as social media such as Facebook (Papuan Voices), Twitter (@papuan\_voices), and Instagram (@papuanvoices) so that it can be accessed by the public at national and global levels. In addition, PV is also involved in various activities outside Papua, such as the Roadshow program entitled "Tutur Ufuk Timur" organized by PV with Engage Media in six cities in Java (Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Solo, Salatiga, and Semarang) in 2018.

In general, these activities are part of a new process of defining Papua according to the perspective of indigenous Papuans, as well as a way to

establish a collective Papuan identity to build the spirit, sympathy, and solidarity of non-Papuan people to create a counter-hegemonic, joint movement, i.e., fighting for democratic values on Papua land. In this way, each generation is expected to become a mass mobilizing actor at the grassroots level to build counter-hegemony against dominant discourse, such as globalization and developmentalism, that threatens democracy and social justice. Under these conditions, efforts to garner support, sympathy, consensus, and trust from the public become a necessity.

## Conclusion

Since its emergence in Europe and America at the beginning of the 20th century, until now, social movements have become an interesting phenomenon to study. Social movements have become a field of study that are relatively



long and continue to experience theoretical and practical updates.

As part of the study of new social movements in the Marxist tradition, this paper draws on the idea of Gramsci's hegemony, elaborated in a post-structuralism approach to see the political dynamics of PV's cultural movement. Although many aspects are part of the study of social movements, this paper only emphasizes the background of the birth of PV as a collective identity and efforts to create new meaning about Papua according to the perspective of indigenous Papuans as part of counter-hegemony.

The results of the analysis show that mainstream mass media, such as online media, television, and feature films, become the working tools of the regime's hegemony apparatus in shaping a biased public opinion about Papua. Through these media, the ideology of the ruler is

instilled and disseminated to gain the approval and consensus of the wider community related to two things. First, Papua needs control, civilization, and development, where the regime apparatus is the main subject. In this perception, there is a political imagination on the best role the state and its apparatus can play, at the same time legitimizing a number of development policies and practices, although they are opposed to the socio-historical conditions in Papua. Second, the mass media is used to obscure the interests and political orientation of development, which is full of exploitation, discrimination, and subordination practices in Papua.

It is on this basis that PV exists as a historical bloc and forms a collective identity. Interestingly, various wills and demands from various elements of society can be integrated into a collective identity in the name

of Papuan voices. There is no single category in terms of issues being fought for or participants in the movement because it includes the universality of wills and demands that uphold human rights and the preservation of Papuan nature. It means that PV is not fighting for a single issue, such as anti-capitalism or racism alone. The participation is not based on a particular ethnicity, religion, or social class but on an ideology that binds each individual together in a collective identity. The ideology is not an abstract idea that is far from empirical reality but has a materialistic nature because it is based on the understanding and closeness of the mobilizing actors to the experience of the daily life of Papuans.

In addition to forming a collective identity, PV's cultural activism also aims to counter hegemony. By utilizing documentary films, they produce

a medium for campaigns and advocacy in the community. PV activists continue to strive to create new meanings about nature and Papuan people based on the perspective of Papuans. The process of creating a new meaning involves popular education, which aims to raise critical awareness about the situation and living conditions of Papuans and overcome the problems.

In this way, PV fights to gain public trust and consensus while continuing to regenerate agents of change for the hegemonic continuity of its activism. In this case, documentary films are not merely works of art but are part of the political work of the leadership to realize popular democracy. It provides a space for Papuans to fight for social change and transformation. Thus, in addition to being a medium of articulation of the daily life experiences of



Papuans, documentary films are also a field of contestation of meaning while criticizing the working model of liberal democracy that does not favor the sovereignty of the people.





## References

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Alua, A. A. (2006). *Papua Barat dari Pangkuan ke Pangkuan: Suatu Ikhtisar Kronologis*. Jayapura: Sekretariat Presidium Dewan Papua dan Biro Penelitian STFT Fajar Timur.
- Anggraeni, D. (2011, July). Another East: Representation of Papua in Popular Media. In *PROCEEDINGS ICSSIS 2011 3rd International Conference on Indonesian Studies, FIPB–University of Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://icssis.wordpress.com/prosiding/prosiding-icssis-2011/>
- Butler, J., Laclau, E., & Žižek, S. (2000). *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues On The Left*. London: Verso.
- Fatubun, W. (2023). Papuan Voices: An Initiative for Decolonized Filmmaking to Document Indigenous People's Lived Experiences in West Papua. *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 8(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23644583-bja10044>
- Ginsburg, F. (1995). Mediating Culture: Indigenous Media, Ethnographic Film, and the Production of Identity. In L. Devereaux & R. Hillman (Eds.), *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography* (pp. 256-290). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell-Smith, Trans.). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hutagalung, D. (2006, February). Laclau-Mouffe Tentang Gerakan Sosial. *Basis*, 55 (01-02).





- Ives, P. (2004). *Language And Hegemony In Gramsci*. London: Pluto Press.
- Jones, S. (2006). *Antonio Gramsci*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London and New York: Verso.
- Melucci, A. (1989). *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Patria, N., & Arief, A. (1999). *Antonio Gramsci: Negara dan Hegemoni*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Saukko, P. (2003). *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Simon, R. (2004). *Gagasan-Gagasan Politik Gramsci* (Kamdani & I. Baihaqi, Trans.). Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Suryawan, I. N. (2011). Antropologi Gerakan Sosial: Membaca Transformasi Identitas Budaya di Kota Manokwari, Papua Barat. *Humaniora*, 23(3), 290-300.
- Williams, R. (1989). *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, and Socialism*. London: Verso.
- Yayusman, M. S., & Pamungkas, C. (2023). Papuan Voices: Digital Media Usage for Peacebuilding. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 18(3), 347-352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15423166231201125>

