VISUALIZING MARGINALIZED GROUPS: DECOLONIAL STORYTELLING AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN INDONESIAN ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARIES (2025–2026)

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Abstract

The acceleration of resource extraction-based National Strategic Projects in Indonesia has triggered the dispossession of Indigenous living spaces and epistemic tensions regarding the politics of representation in environmental advocacy media. This study aims to examine how the politics of representation, the visual counter-gaze, and solastalgia are constructed in the documentary films *Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente* (2025) and *Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita* (2026) to challenge the state's dominant development narrative. Using a qualitative-interpretative approach with a comparative case study design, audiovisual data from both films were analyzed through a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis framework integrated with decolonial theory, The Right to Look, and solastalgia. The findings reveal that both films reject the homogenization of Indigenous peoples as passive victims by asserting their epistemic authority and political agency, although the risk of poverty pornography persists through the framing of hierarchies of suffering. The visual counter-gaze is established through eye-level camera placement, direct subject eye contact, collective body shots, and the dismantling of financial-political structures. Furthermore, the representation of solastalgia and ecological loss serves as an affective-ecological rebuttal to the state's claims of sustainability, energy resilience, and food security. This study concludes that decolonization in documentary practice is determined not only by political stance, but also by how a film articulates narrative, visual, and affective authority alongside its represented subjects.

Keywords: Decoloniality; Environmental documentary films; Politics of representation; Solastalgia; Visual counter-gaze

INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of extraction-based National Strategic Projects (Proyek Strategis Nasional/PSN) in Indonesia has significantly transformed the social-ecological landscapes across several Indigenous territories. In Central Halmahera, North Maluku, the expansion of nickel mining to supply the electric vehicle battery supply chain increasingly encroaches upon the living spaces of the O'Hongana Manyawa people. Some of them reportedly choose to move deeper into the forest rather than reside in government-provided resettlement areas (Mongabay Indonesia, 2026). A similar pattern is observed in South Papua, where mega-scale food estate and agricultural plantation projects, legitimized through national narratives of food and energy security, have contributed to widespread deforestation within the ancestral lands of the Marind, Yei, Awyu, and Muyu peoples without obtaining their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) (AMAN, 2026). These cases expose a fundamental tension between the state's narrative of "green

development" and "food-energy self-sufficiency" and the material realities experienced by Indigenous communities whose territories are transformed in the name of these agendas. Consequently, a critical question arises regarding the very meaning of sustainability: sustainable for whom, and at whose expense?

This tension becomes increasingly vital because affected communities face not only the material dispossession of their living spaces, but also a struggle over how their experiences are narrated and represented to the public. Environmental conflicts are simultaneously conflicts over knowledge, visibility, and the authority to define what constitutes development, sustainability, and environmental degradation. In this context, documentary films can function as counter-hegemony media to question and contest dominant development narratives. Two recent Indonesian documentaries serve as highly relevant cases: *Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente* (Muhammad Sridipo, 2025), which traces the political-economic interests behind nickel downstreaming in Halmahera, and *Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita* (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026), which documents the struggles of Indigenous peoples in South Papua to defend their ancestral lands and sacred rituals from the expansion of food estate projects.

However, these documentaries cannot simply be understood as transparent "community voices" opposing the state. Both films were produced through urban-based collectives and non-governmental organization networks, rather than directly by the represented Indigenous communities. This raises a fundamental epistemic concern: who is speaking, from what position, and for whom? A documentary film can challenge state power while simultaneously maintaining unequal narrative authority relations between the producers and the represented communities. Thus, the issue is not merely whether a film sides with marginalized groups, but whether and how its modes of production and representation challenge the structures that have historically caused marginal groups to always be spoken for by external actors.

This representational dilemma operates visually as well as textually. The documentary camera determines who is positioned as the viewing subject and who remains the object to be seen, while degraded landscapes and threatened rituals are frequently framed as evidence of a loss far broader than the mere depletion of resources. The question then becomes not only who speaks, but also who is granted the space to

gaze back, and how the loss of home and ecological ties is mobilized to refute state claims of sustainable development.

These issues open a critical space for academic and empirical inquiry. Previous research has examined decolonial media, Indigenous self-representation, environmental documentaries, the visual counter-gaze, and the representation of suffering through poverty pornography. However, these scholarly strands have largely developed in isolation, and their intersections remain underexplored within the Indonesian context. Specifically, limited research simultaneously examines the politics of Indigenous representation, the potential risk of poverty pornography in advocacy-oriented environmental documentaries, the visual counter-gaze as a challenge to hegemonic development narratives, and solastalgia alongside ecological loss as affective resistance against state sustainability claims. Furthermore, media scholarship in Indonesia tends to emphasize textual and discursive dimensions, leaving the multimodal interplay among imagery, narrative, and sound relatively unexplored.

Building on this background, this article analyzes *Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente* (Muhammad Sridipo, 2025) and *Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita* (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026) as two contemporary environmental documentaries directly responding to extractive development and Indigenous land dispossession in Indonesia. This study integrates Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2008), decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), Mirzoeff's (2011) concept of The Right to Look, and Albrecht's (2005) concept of solastalgia into a single analytical framework. Through this combination, the article examines representation, visuality, and the affect of ecological loss as three interconnected dimensions of documentary politics rather than isolated analytical concerns.

This article poses three research questions: (1) How is the politics of representation constructed in both documentary films, and to what extent do their narrative and visual strategies risk reproducing the logic of poverty pornography when representing Indigenous peoples? (2) How do the visual strategies of both films form a visual counter-gaze by configuring the relationships among the camera, Indigenous peoples, and the object of the gaze? (3) How are solastalgia and the representation of ecological loss

utilized to challenge dominant narratives surrounding development, sustainability, food security, and energy security? The novelty of this research lies in its synthesis of decolonial storytelling, the politics of representation, the visual counter-gaze, and solastalgia into a unified multimodal analytical framework applied to the latest Indonesian environmental documentaries responding to extractive projects in 2025–2026. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to media and decoloniality studies in Southeast Asia while offering empirical and theoretical insights into the broader debates on just energy transitions and socio-ecological justice in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Decoloniality, Indigenous Representation, and the Politics of Enunciation

The question of who speaks, from what position, and for whom constitutes a central concern in decolonial media studies. Mignolo (2011) argues that the colonial matrix of power continues to operate within modernity, including through practices that explicitly position themselves as anti-colonial. From this perspective, contesting state or corporate power cannot automatically be qualified as a decolonial practice if the authority to produce and circulate knowledge is still shaped by unequal relations. Mignolo and Walsh (2018) further emphasize the importance of the politics of enunciation, demanding critical attention to the locus from which a narrative is produced and the subjects constructed as its target. This perspective is particularly relevant for advocacy media, where progressive political intentions can coexist with asymmetric relationships between producers and the communities being represented.

The field of decolonial media studies developed, in part, as a response to the dominance of Euro-American theoretical frameworks within media scholarship in the Global South. Moyo (2020) argues that decolonizing media studies in Africa requires a Southern theory rooted in its own historical and geographical conditions, rather than merely adapting Western theoretical models. Govenden (2023) extends this argument by demonstrating how solidarity-based media practices in South Africa can disrupt the Euro-American media canon through modes of production that reject extractive logic. These studies demonstrate that decolonization involves not only shifting the political content of media, but also questioning the epistemic and institutional structures that shape media

knowledge production. However, both studies primarily focus on the African context, leaving their implications for Southeast Asian media—specifically Indonesian environmental documentaries—largely underexplored.

The issue of epistemic authority becomes even more critical when media represents Indigenous peoples. Wilson and Stewart (2008) contend that the right of Indigenous peoples to produce images of themselves is a political right rather than a purely aesthetic matter. Representation thus encompasses questions of agency, authority, and ownership over the production of cultural meaning. When the camera is controlled by external actors, even those carrying an explicit advocacy agenda, the possibility of objectification persists. A documentary film can speak out against territorial dispossession, yet simultaneously speak on behalf of those experiencing that dispossession.

This dilemma is further clarified through the concept of poverty pornography. Law and Mooney (2011) show how the representation of suffering in Western humanitarian journalism can commodify poverty to evoke emotional responses from audiences, potentially at the expense of the dignity and agency of the subjects represented. Similar concerns have begun to emerge in Indonesian scholarship regarding digital content that exploits representations of poverty for popularity and audience attention (Nafiah, 2024). Nevertheless, studies on poverty pornography remain largely focused on philanthropy, humanitarian communication, and digital entertainment, rather than environmental documentaries that self-consciously position themselves as challenges to state and corporate power.

This gap is analytically significant because political solidarity with marginalized communities does not automatically resolve representational challenges. An advocacy documentary can challenge dominant development narratives while still utilizing images of suffering to construct emotional authority. Consequently, the relevant question is not merely whether a documentary supports Indigenous peoples, but how it constructs their visibility, agency, suffering, and political voice. In this study, decoloniality and Indigenous representation are treated as interconnected dimensions to examine the politics of enunciation in documentary film.

Environmental Documentaries and the Visual Counter-Gaze

Environmental documentaries serve as crucial spaces for contesting dominant development narratives because their cinematic form determines not only which environmental issues are addressed, but also how ecological conflicts are rendered visible and intelligible. Cortés-Monroy (2025), comparing two anti-extractivist documentaries in Latin America, demonstrates that different documentary modes—including expository and observational approaches—yield distinct ways of interrogating the rhetoric of extractivist development. Documentary aesthetics are therefore integral to the politics of environmental representation, rather than mere techniques for delivering factual information.

Research within the Indonesian context similarly shows that environmental documentaries can function as arenas of ideological contestation. Yesicha (2024), utilizing critical discourse analysis on WatchdoC documentaries such as Kinipan and Limbung Pangan, identifies tensions between capitalist rationality and ecological ideology. Meanwhile, Rosadha et al. (2025) demonstrate that environmental framing in mainstream Indonesian media remains prone to reducing ecological issues to legal-administrative matters, rather than framing them within broader socio-ecological justice terms. These studies highlight the ideological character of environmental representation in Indonesia. However, because most rely on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, textual and discursive dimensions receive greater attention than the visual and multimodal dimensions that are fundamental to audiovisual documentary film.

The visual dimension of environmental representation can be expanded through the theory of the counter-gaze and visual politics. Mirzoeff (2011) conceptualizes The Right to Look as a challenge to visual regimes that dictate who holds the authority to organize the field of vision and who is placed as an object within it. Countervisuality, in this sense, is a claim to "look back" and contest hegemonic visual authority. A related formulation appears in hooks' (1992) concept of the oppositional gaze, which understands the act of looking as a potential form of epistemic resistance rather than a passive act of viewing. Both perspectives offer a framework for analyzing visuality as an arena of political struggle.These concepts are directly applicable to environmental documentaries depicting the destruction of Indigenous lands. The politics of seeing in such documentaries

concerns not just whether landscapes or communities are rendered visible, but how they are positioned within the visual field: as passive victims, political agents, witnesses, or subjects capable of returning the dominant gaze. This distinction is crucial because visual representations of environmental destruction can reinforce the spectacle of suffering, but they can also construct a counter-gaze that challenges dominant claims regarding development and sustainability.

Although the counter-gaze and visual politics are highly relevant for understanding environmental representation, both frameworks remain relatively underapplied to documentaries addressing the displacement of Indigenous peoples due to extractive projects. This provides an opportunity to bridge visual theory with the analysis of Indonesian environmental documentaries. In this study, The Right to Look and the oppositional gaze are employed to analyze how relations between the camera, bodies, and gaze direction can challenge hegemonic representations that frame extraction as development, sustainability, or national progress.

Solastalgia, Ecological Loss, and Development Narratives

The concept of solastalgia provides an essential framework for understanding the affective dimensions of environmental degradation experienced by Indigenous communities. Albrecht (2005) defines solastalgia as the psychological distress caused by environmental change and the loss of a familiar home place while one remains physically present within that changing environment. Unlike nostalgia, which involves a longing for a place left behind, solastalgia arises amid physical presence in a transformed location—the distress experienced when one's own home becomes alien. For Indigenous communities facing mining expansion and mega-food estate projects, environmental destruction cannot be reduced to the mere loss of ecological resources; it represents a disruption of living relationships with territory, collective memory, rituals, identity, and the sense of belonging to a living space.

When presented audiovisuals, such loss does not exist in isolation as an ecological fact, but is shaped by the aesthetic and visual choices of the filmmaker. Cortés-Monroy (2025) notes that degraded landscapes in anti-extractivist documentaries can function not simply as backdrops, but as visual evidence countering state and corporate claims of sustainability and progress. Emphasizing destruction, silence, or the absence of what once

was can thus operate as a distinct visual counter-gaze—a way of looking back that positions ecological damage as a visual argument rather than an informative background.

This form of ecological loss directly confronts the state's development narratives, particularly claims of green development, energy self-sufficiency, and food security legitimizing nickel projects in Halmahera and food estates in South Papua. From a decolonial perspective, such sustainability claims can be read as continuations of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011), treating Indigenous territories as extractable resources for externally defined interests. Studies on WatchdoC documentaries (Yesicha, 2024) and media representations in Indonesia (Rosadha et al., 2025) show that development framing frequently pushes Indigenous experiences of loss to the margins while mainstreaming economic progress narratives. Representing solastalgia thus holds potential as narrative resistance, recentering the lived experience of place loss to refute sustainability claims measured solely through production figures and investment metrics.

While solastalgia has been widely applied in environmental psychology and ecological humanities across Australia, Europe, and North America, its application to Indonesian environmental documentaries—specifically in analyzing how ecological loss is visualized to challenge state development narratives—remains rare. In this study, solastalgia is integrated with visual counter-gaze and decolonial frameworks to interpret representations of ecological loss not merely as collateral damage of environmental destruction, but as a site of narrative contestation between state development claims and the lived experiences of Indigenous communities.

Overall, the literature review outlines three interconnected dimensions within the politics of documentary environmental representation. Decoloniality and Indigenous representation highlight the politics of enunciation—the authority to produce and define the experiences of marginalized groups, including the risk of poverty pornography. The visual counter-gaze emphasizes the politics of visibility—how the camera, landscapes, bodies, and gazes position Indigenous peoples as political subjects rather than objects. Meanwhile, solastalgia highlights the affective dimension of ecological loss and how the experience of place loss can challenge dominant development narratives. Although these three perspectives have developed within their respective fields, their integration to analyze Indonesian environmental documentaries concerning Indigenous peoples and

extractive projects remains limited. This study connects these three dimensions to examine how environmental documentaries negotiate knowledge authority, visibility, and affective experiences of ecological loss when confronting dominant development narratives.

The two films under study, Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente and Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita, are understood as representational spaces where decoloniality, visual politics, and ecological loss intersect. This framework allows the study to analyze not only how both films challenge extractivist development narratives, but also how Indigenous peoples are represented through the interplay of epistemic authority, subject positioning within the visual field, and the lived experience of ecological loss. Thus, the analytical focus extends beyond whether a film aligns with Indigenous peoples to examine how that alignment is constructed through the film's articulation of voice, visibility, and loss within ecological conflicts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-interpretative approach with a comparative case study design on two Indonesian environmental documentaries: *Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente* (Muhammad Sridipo, 2025) and *Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita* (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026). Both films were selected purposively as they represent ecological conflicts and Indigenous communities within the context of expanding extractive projects while possessing advocacy dimensions directly relevant to the focus of this research. The primary data consist of the complete audiovisual content of both films, encompassing imagery, dialogue, voice-overs, sound, music, on-screen text, visual composition, camera techniques, editing, landscapes, body positioning, as well as the expressions and actions of the subjects recorded.

Data collection was conducted through repeated audiovisual observations of both films. The analytical units comprise scenes or sequences relevant to the three central research focuses: the politics of representation, the visual counter-gaze, and solastalgia. Each relevant scene was logged with timestamps and categorized into analytical classifications, including the representation of Indigenous peoples, relations between communities and state/corporate actors, forms of suffering and vulnerability, agency and

resistance, visual composition and camera placement, and narratives surrounding development, sustainability, food, and energy. Each unit of analysis was analyzed as a multimodal configuration uniting visual, verbal, and auditory elements.

Data analysis applies Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2008) integrated with decolonial theory, *The Right to Look*, and solastalgia. To address the first research question, a decolonial perspective (Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) is applied to evaluate the politics of enunciation—specifically the locus of the speaking subject and the targeted narrative—and to examine the potential for poverty pornography by analyzing whether depictions of suffering objectify subjects or, conversely, provide contextual grounding, vocal articulation, and political agency for the communities.

The second research question is addressed by analyzing how shot composition, camera angles and distances, subject positioning, and gaze direction construct visual relations among the camera, Indigenous peoples, and the object of the gaze. This dimension is interpreted through *The Right to Look* (Mirzoeff, 2011) and the *oppositional gaze* (hooks, 1992) to trace the formation of the visual counter-gaze.

The third research question is examined using the concept of solastalgia (Albrecht, 2005) to deconstruct representations of landscapes, ecological loss, and detachment from living spaces as articulations of resistance against the state's narratives of development, sustainability, food security, and energy independence.

The analysis of both films is conducted comparatively rather than as isolated cases, explicitly identifying similarities and differences in their representational strategies, counter-gaze formations, and portrayals of solastalgia. Across all three analytical dimensions, strict distinction is maintained between raw data, description, and interpretation established during the observation phase. Consequently, claims regarding the presence or absence of poverty pornography, the counter-gaze, or solastalgia in specific scenes serve as final analytical conclusions rather than initial assumptions. Interpretative validity is maintained through triangulation among the audiovisual data, contextual background materials concerning both films, and critical reading using the three integrated analytical perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from repeated audiovisual observations of Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente (Muhammad Sridipo, 2025) and Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026). The analysis is structured according to the three-core research focuses and conducted comparatively rather than treat the films as isolated cases. The empirical data—derived from scene logs, narrator commentary, and direct quotes from interviewees as recorded in the observation instruments—are interpreted through an integrated framework combining Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, decolonial perspectives, The Right to Look / the oppositional gaze, and solastalgia.

The Politics of Representation and the Risk of Poverty Pornography

Both films exhibit non-uniform representational patterns across their interviewees. features an affected resident as the narrative opener (Ismu), followed by several expert interviewees labeled with institutional affiliations in the lower-third text, namely Danang Widoyoko (Transparency International Indonesia), Ashov Birri (Trend Asia), Faisal Basri (economist), and Melky Nahar (JATAM), alongside Sukriyadi, a former PT IMIP worker who was a victim of unilateral termination. *Pesta Babi* features five primary interviewees, all of whom are affected Indigenous residents: Yasinta Moiwend (Marind Tribe), Natalis Buer, Vincen/Victor Kwipalo (Yei Tribe), Franky Woro (Awyu Tribe), and Wilem Kimko (Muyu Tribe), who are labeled with tribal affiliations rather than institutional ones. This difference in labeling format is not merely a technical convention: it marks two distinct regimes of authority, namely credential-based epistemic authority (experts, institutions) and experience- and communal-membership-based epistemic authority (tribes, clans). Read through Mignolo and Walsh (2018), this distinction demonstrates an explicit politics of enunciation: both films recognize that the locus of speech influences how one is heard, thereby positioning Indigenous residents as speakers with their own authority, rather than merely as objects spoken about by experts.



Figure 1. *Poster for the film Bloody Nickel: Republik Rente.*

Source: Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente (Muhammad Sridipo, 2025).

Pesta Babi explicitly differentiates the positions of its five interviewees based on the degree and nature of the impacts they experience: Yasinta is depicted as "already a victim" because her forest and swamps have been destroyed; Natalis "feels abandoned" because he lacks the capital to cultivate the available rice fields; Vincen is "currently becoming a victim" because his ancestral forest is being destroyed; Franky is positioned as a "prospective victim" as well as a pioneer of the red cross movement; while Wilem Kimko is "not yet a victim" and is depicted as preparing for all possibilities. This gradation is analytically important because it avoids the homogenization of suffering: rather than presenting all Indigenous residents as equal passive victims, the film distinguishes the degree of vulnerability alongside the degree of agency of each individual, from victims who have lost their livelihoods to figures actively consolidating community resistance. The position of Franky and Wilem Kimko as instigators, rather than mere recipients of impact, aligns with Wilson and Stewart's (2008) emphasis that the representation of Indigenous peoples ideally places them as subjects who possess agency over their own narratives.



Figure 2. *Poster for the film Pesta Babi.*

Source: Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026).

The pattern of representation in both films is also supported by the extensive use of data and structural investigation, rather than solely images of suffering. *Bloody Nickel* pairs resident testimonies with infographics regarding investment networks and "rent-seekers," as well as analytical quotes such as Ashov Birri's statement that "the Job Creation Law and the Mining Law, combined with the KPK Law, make corruption increasingly difficult to prevent." *Pesta Babi* traces the ownership structure of ten sugarcane companies in Merauke back to several main owners, along with their wealth figures and legal histories. This strategy shifts part of the narrative weight from the suffering of the subjects toward the accountability of the actors who benefit, thereby reducing—though not entirely eliminating—the risk of poverty pornography critiqued by Law and Mooney (2011). However, a point of tension was also found that needs to be noted: *Pesta Babi*'s narrative comparing the level of "luck" among interviewees, such as the statement that Franky is "still luckier, at least compared to Yasinta Moiwend... who has already lost her forest and swamps," potentially presents a hierarchy of suffering that is instrumental to narrative needs, a tendency precisely warned against by critiques of poverty pornography.

The complexity of representation is further evident in how both films avoid depicting the community as a homogeneous entity. *Pesta Babi* depicts a division of attitudes within the Archdiocese of Merauke, where church authorities were reported to support the National Strategic Project while Catholic congregants protesting this stance

were arrested by the police—critically responded to by a bishop who referred to some church leaders as "Judas" figures. The film also includes the testimony of a worker from Java stating that the government's claim of prioritizing native Papuan labor does not match field realities. These elements demonstrate that the politics of representation in both films is not built on a simple binary opposition between "the state" and "Indigenous peoples," but rather acknowledges cracks of interest within and across groups—a nuance consistent with Mignolo and Walsh's (2018) warning that decoloniality demands honesty regarding the complexity of power relations, not their simplification.

Visual Counter-Gaze: Who Sees and Who Is Seen

Visual observation of both documentaries reveals two distinct compositional regimes corresponding to the two categories of interviewees. Expert interviewees in Bloody Nickel are generally framed in medium close-ups within neatly arranged indoor settings, dressed formally, and accompanied by lower-third text specifying their names and institutional affiliations—a visual convention of investigative journalism that signals authority through credentials and a structured mise-en-scène (Figure 1). Conversely, Indigenous residents across both films are typically recorded within their own lived spaces: Ismu is filmed navigating a river from behind as opening footage, while female interviewees in Pesta Babi are recorded in their yards and personal garden plots against the backdrop of stilt houses and newly cleared land. Read through Mirzoeff (2011), this difference in register highlights two distinct modes of visual relationship: expert authority is constructed through distance and formal credentials, whereas Indigenous presence is established through spatial proximity and everyday life, rather than through the same formal apparatuses.



Figure 3. *Visual register of expert interviewees: indoor close-ups with formal institutional credentials. Source: Still from Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente (Muhammad Sridipo, 2025).*

A crucial point for the visual counter-gaze is found in a testimonial scene featuring one of the female interviewees in *Pesta Babi*. She is filmed standing at eye level with the camera, looking directly into the lens while speaking on her own newly cleared garden plot, stating, *"Our environment is ruined... The habitats for pigs and deer are gone now"* (Figure 2). The camera-subject relationship in this scene does not position the speaker as an object observed from a distance, but rather as a narrator staring back at the audience from an eye-level position on her own land. Read through the *oppositional gaze* (hooks, 1992), this moment of gazing back functions as an assertion of subjectivity, rather than merely being recorded as an object of suffering. A similar pattern appears in a scene with Kwipalo, a member of the Yei tribe, who guides the camera along his land boundary while pointing out the location of forest clearing (*"This is the forest. This forest right here, the one they are clearing now... It's very close"*), establishing a camera position that follows the subject's lead rather than monitoring the subject from the outside.



Figure 4. *Direct testimony to the camera at eye level on the speaker's own land. Source: Still from Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026).*

Another relevant aspect of the visual counter-gaze is the use of collective shots during the red cross erection scene in *Pesta Babi*, when a large number of Awyu tribal members gather around a giant red cross while raising their hands and reciting a declaration: *"Awyu land is not empty land. Indigenous people. We are still here... Reject, reject, reject"* (Figure 3). The wide shot displaying the collective body confronting the cross symbol asserts Indigenous peoples as an organized political body, rather than a

collection of individuals suffering in isolation. Similarly, the opening shot of *Bloody Nickel*, which records Ismu from behind as he navigates the river, positions the camera as a companion on the subject's journey into his own landscape, rather than an observer confronting him. Within the MCDA framework (Van Leeuwen, 2008; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), these compositional choices—gaze direction, camera distance, and collective versus individual body positioning—shape visual power relations: the camera is not used to organize and dominate the view over the subject, but rather to walk alongside or stand eye-to-eye with them.



Figure 5. *Collective shot during the red cross erection ritual: Indigenous peoples as an organized political body. Source: Still from Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita (Dandhy Laksono & Cypri Paju Dale, 2026).*

It should be noted that the observational data for *Bloody Nickel* contains fewer visual composition details compared to *Pesta Babi*, meaning the comparison along this dimension is not entirely symmetrical; this observation itself, however, reveals a meaningful distinction between the two films. *Bloody Nickel* relies more heavily on data infographics—such as investment networks and rent-seeking structures—as its primary visual unit, allowing its counter-gaze to operate chiefly through the visualization of financial-political power structures. *Pesta Babi*, by contrast, consistently returns to the bodies, landscapes, and gazes of Indigenous residents as its primary visual units, meaning its counter-gaze operates primarily through direct spatial proximity and face-to-face confrontation with human subjects. This distinction demonstrates that a visual counter-gaze can be constructed through at least two distinct pathways: by dismantling hidden power structures or by returning the direct gaze to the represented subjects. Both

pathways align with, and expand the empirical scope of, Mirzoeff's (2011) *The Right to Look* framework.

Solastalgia and Visual Resistance to Development Narratives

The dimension of solastalgia is most prominently observed in Pesta Babi, particularly through testimonies that explicitly contrast past and present conditions. Beyond the accounts regarding the loss of hunting grounds for wild boar and deer mentioned earlier, residents also testify to altered relationships with local rivers: "We used to walk and cook by the river. We used river water. We drank river water. Now how are you supposed to cook? There is no water, it's already murky... Everything uses chemicals now. They spray that sugarcane using drones." The narrative structure of "used to... now" in this quote directly embodies what Albrecht (2005) terms solastalgia—the acute distress experienced not from being displaced from a place, but from the place itself becoming alien while the speakers remain living within it. Footage of a cassowary appearing disoriented in a freshly cleared deforested plot visually reinforces this dimension, conveying an ecological loss endured not only by humans, but also by other living species sharing the same living space.

Pesta Babi also evokes solastalgia by portraying ecological relationships meant to be preserved, rather than exclusively focusing on destruction already wrought. The narrator asserts that for the Awyu and Marind peoples, sago is kin—framing food plants not as raw resources, but as entities bound by kinship. The depth of this relationship is further evidenced in the practice of naming pigs destined for the Awon Atatbon ceremony (the pig feast): one pig belonging to the Kimko clan was named "Tiger" and left to range freely in a 479-hectare ancestral forest for ten years prior to the ritual. This practice illustrates an ecological economy built upon reciprocity and long-term stewardship rather than transient ownership. By rendering visible what is cherished and guarded, not merely what has been lost, the film constructs a visual argument that directly counters the "vacant land" claims commonly deployed to legitimize extractive projects, aligning with Cortés-Monroy's (2025) finding that landscapes in anti-extractivist documentaries can serve as visual evidence rather than mere decorative backgrounds.

Resistance to the state's development narrative is also constructed through the repeated assertion that "Papua is not empty land," which echoes multiple times throughout

the film in both the voiceover and the formal declarations of the Awyu people. This repetition directly targets the logic of terra nullius, identified by Mignolo (2011) as a core mechanism of the colonial matrix of power used to justify the appropriation of land deemed uncultivated. This critique is reinforced through a historical genealogy built by the narrator, linking contemporary sugarcane-bioethanol projects in Papua to the Dutch Cultivation System (Cultuurstelsel) in Java, forced-labor sugarcane plantations in Suriname and the Caribbean, and slavery in Spanish sugarcane fields, culminating in the statement that "like all stories of colonialism, some will feast, and others will pay." Furthermore, the film empirically challenges the state's claims of food-energy project successes by tracing a legacy of failed precedents—namely, the mega-rice project in Kalimantan's peatlands under Suharto that resulted in the largest forest fires and haze crisis in history, the MIFEE project under Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and the cassava food estate under Prabowo in Central Kalimantan, all framed as failures. By synthesizing an affective critique of place loss with a technocratic critique of policy track records, Pesta Babi confronts the state's "green development" and food-energy security narratives on two fronts simultaneously: lived experience and policy precedent.

Compared to Pesta Babi, observational data for Bloody Nickel reveals less affective content centered on ecological loss; while the film touches upon nickel-driven destruction and flooding affecting local farmlands, it does not expand upon these through personal testimonies of place loss to the depth found in Pesta Babi. Instead, Bloody Nickel's critique of development narratives is primarily constructed by exposing contradictions between decarbonization commitments and the realities of downstreaming policies, as well as the rent-seeking networks underpinning them. This distinction demonstrates that both films pursue different routes to contest state development narratives: Pesta Babi emphasizes an affective-ecological register through solastalgia, whereas Bloody Nickel emphasizes a structural-economic register through rent-seeking investigation. These two registers complement one another, collectively demonstrating that resistance to state sustainability claims in contemporary Indonesian environmental documentaries does not operate through a single narrative strategy, but through a mutually reinforcing combination of affective and structural evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of Bloody Nickel The Series: Republik Rente and Pesta Babi: Kolonialisme di Zaman Kita demonstrates that both documentaries construct resistance against the state's narratives of "green development" and food-energy security through three interconnected strategies: a politics of representation that avoids homogenizing Indigenous peoples as passive victims, a visual counter-gaze that returns the authority of looking to the represented subjects, and solastalgia that presents ecological loss as an affective rebuttal to state sustainability claims. Both films pursue distinct pathways to arrive at this resistance: Bloody Nickel foregrounds a structural investigation into the rent-seeking networks behind nickel downstreaming, whereas Pesta Babi emphasizes spatial proximity, direct gaze, and testimonies of place loss among Indigenous communities in South Papua. This divergence illustrates that decoloniality in documentary practice cannot be measured solely by political alignment, but must also be evaluated by how the production process negotiates narrative, visual, and affective authority alongside its represented subjects. These findings affirm that analyzing Indonesian extractivism documentaries from the 2025–2026 period requires an analytical framework integrating textual, visual, and affective dimensions simultaneously—a contribution that enriches media and decoloniality scholarship in Southeast Asia as well as the discourse on a just energy transition in Indonesia.

This research carries several limitations that warrant acknowledgment. The depth of audiovisual observational data is not entirely symmetrical between the two films, resulting in the visual counter-gaze and solastalgia analyses relying more heavily on Pesta Babi than on Bloody Nickel. Furthermore, the scope is confined to two case studies, requiring caution when generalizing findings to the broader corpus of Indonesian environmental documentaries. The analysis also focuses primarily on the textual and visual elements of both films without examining how actual audiences decode the representations, counter-gaze, and solastalgia under study. Future research could expand the corpus to include additional Indonesian environmental documentaries to test the consistency of the identified patterns, conduct audience reception studies to understand how viewers from diverse backgrounds interpret the positions of victim, witness, and agent, and investigate the dimensions of distribution and digital circulation intentionally

omitted from this study—particularly given that both films experienced restricted viewing spaces and platform shifts, opening potential new avenues for examining the politics of environmental documentary circulation in Indonesia.

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