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Cultural Hegemony and Local Resistance in the Flow of Global Interconnectedness: Sociological and Postcolonial Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The acceleration of global interconnectedness — driven by digital communication technologies, transnational capital flows, and the proliferation of global media and entertainment industries — has intensified both the reach of cultural hegemony and the visibility of local cultural resistance. This article examines the dynamics of cultural hegemony and local resistance in the context of contemporary global interconnectedness through an integrative theoretical framework synthesizing Gramsci's hegemony theory, Said's Orientalism and discourse analysis, Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and cultural hybridity, and Spivak's subaltern studies, alongside contemporary digital sociology. Through systematic qualitative literature review and analysis of empirical evidence on Indonesian cultural politics in the global arena, the study identifies four principal domains in which cultural hegemony operates through the mechanisms of global interconnectedness — entertainment and popular culture, academic and knowledge hierarchy, development discourse, and beauty and fashion standards — and maps the corresponding forms of local resistance that Indonesian communities, civil society organizations, and cultural entrepreneurs have developed. The analysis demonstrates that local resistance to cultural hegemony in the digital era takes forms that are neither simply reactive nor purely assimilationist, but reflect the creative hybridization and strategic deployment of both local and global cultural resources that postcolonial theory identifies as characteristic of subaltern agency. The Indonesian case — with its remarkable combination of cultural diversity, Islamic identity politics, national ideology, and digital connectivity — illustrates the complex, multilevel character of contemporary cultural hegemony contestation in a major Global South democracy.

Keywords

cultural hegemony; Gramsci; Indonesia; local resistance; postcolonial theory; global interconnectedness; Bhabha; Said



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1. Introduction

In 2019, a controversy erupted across Indonesian social media when a major international fast-food chain launched an advertising campaign in Indonesia featuring a hijab-wearing young woman who, in the advertisement's narrative, reluctantly removes her hijab at her grandmother's

request because the grandmother finds it 'too modern.' The advertisement, designed by a multinational agency with limited understanding of Indonesian Islamic culture, was perceived by millions of Indonesian Muslims as a degrading portrayal of Islamic practice as a generational obstacle to modernity — precisely the Orientalist framing that Edward Said's foundational analysis had theorized four decades earlier. Within 48 hours, the campaign was pulled following a massive boycott campaign organized through Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram, with hashtags in both Bahasa Indonesia and English reaching international trending status. What made this episode particularly instructive was not merely the successful resistance — it was the form the resistance took: networked, multilingual, globally visible, and explicitly articulating both Islamic values and Indonesian national dignity in a register that was itself global and media-savvy.

This incident encapsulates the central paradox of cultural hegemony and local resistance in the era of global interconnectedness: the very tools of cultural hegemony — digital platforms, global media reach, transnational visibility — have become weapons in the hands of local resisters. The Indonesian case is paradigmatic here. As the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, fourth most populous nation, and one of Southeast Asia's most digitally active societies, Indonesia occupies a distinctive position in the global cultural economy: simultaneously subject to intense hegemonic pressure from Western and increasingly East Asian (K-Pop, Korean drama, Chinese tech platforms) cultural industries, and possessed of extraordinary cultural resources — religious, linguistic, artistic, culinary, philosophical — with which to construct and assert alternative cultural identities.

The theoretical traditions that most productively illuminate these dynamics are those of cultural hegemony theory — originating with Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and developed through the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies — and postcolonial theory, whose foundational texts by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon provide the conceptual vocabulary for analyzing the persistence of colonial power structures in post-independence cultural formations and the multiple forms of agency through which subaltern communities resist, subvert, and selectively appropriate hegemonic cultural forms. This article develops an integrative theoretical framework that synthesizes these traditions with contemporary digital sociology to analyze the dynamics of cultural hegemony and local resistance in Indonesia's globally interconnected present.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Gramsci's Hegemony and Cultural Leadership

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony — developed in his Prison Notebooks while imprisoned by Mussolini's fascist government — represents the most influential theoretical account of how dominant classes maintain power not primarily through coercion but through the manufacture of consent: the construction of a cultural-ideological consensus that makes the existing social order appear natural, inevitable, and in the interests of all (Gramsci, 2020). For Gramsci, hegemony is never complete or secure — it is always contested, partially achieved, and dependent on the ongoing work of cultural institutions (schools, media, religious organizations) to produce and reproduce the 'common sense' that makes it appear self-evident. The concept of the 'war of position' — the sustained cultural-institutional struggle through which a subordinate social group builds the cultural and organizational resources necessary to challenge hegemony — provides the strategic vocabulary for understanding long-term cultural resistance.

Applied to global cultural dynamics, Gramsci's framework has been extended by scholars including Stuart Hall (2019) and Raymond Williams (2021) to analyze the hegemony of Western cultural forms in the post-colonial world — the global diffusion of English, Western academic epistemologies, Hollywood narratives, and neoliberal economic values as the 'common sense' of the contemporary global order. This global cultural hegemony operates not through direct censorship or prohibition but through the structural advantages that dominant cultural industries possess in global markets: superior resources, established distribution networks, algorithmic amplification on platforms governed by Western-designed logics.

2.2 Postcolonial Theory: Said, Bhabha, and Spivak

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) demonstrated that the 'knowledge' of the non-Western Other produced by Western academic and cultural institutions was not objective description but a discursive construction that served colonial power: by representing the Orient as exotic, irrational, unchanging, and inferior, Orientalist discourse provided the ideological justification for colonial domination. Said's analysis has been enormously influential in documenting how colonial discourse structures — the habit of representing non-Western cultures through Western categorical frameworks,

the hierarchy of Western academic knowledge production, the persistence of colonial stereotypes in global media — persist in ostensibly post-colonial global cultural formations.

Bhabha's theoretical contributions (2019) introduce a different emphasis: rather than focusing primarily on the mechanisms of hegemony (as Said does), Bhabha attends to the creative possibilities of colonial encounter. His concepts of mimicry — the process through which colonized subjects partially replicate colonial culture in ways that are 'almost the same but not quite' — and hybridity — the culturally creative space that opens up in the encounter between different cultural worlds — offer resources for understanding how local actors develop agency within hegemonic constraints, producing cultural forms that neither simply reproduce the dominant nor simply preserve the authentic local but create genuinely new formations.

2.3 Digital Interconnectedness and Contemporary Cultural Hegemony

Castells's (2020) network society theory provides the structural framework for understanding how global interconnectedness reconfigures the terrain of cultural hegemony and resistance. In the network society, power operates through the control of communication networks — the ability to include or exclude, amplify or silence — and resistance takes the form of counter-network construction: the creation of alternative communication channels, counter-narratives, and solidarity networks that operate within or alongside dominant network infrastructure. Lim (2021) has documented the specific dynamics of these processes in the Indonesian context, showing how digital platforms simultaneously enable new forms of cultural hegemony (algorithmic amplification of global content) and new forms of local resistance (viral counter-hegemonic campaigns, local content creator ecosystems).

3. Methodology

This study employs a systematic qualitative literature review methodology combined with documentary analysis of empirical evidence on Indonesian cultural politics. Literature review used Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases with search terms including 'cultural hegemony globalization,' 'postcolonial resistance local culture,' 'Gramsci hegemony Global South,' 'digital cultural resistance Indonesia,' and 'local identity global interconnectedness.' Secondary empirical data was drawn from Kemenparekraf RI (2024), BRIN cultural reports, Wahid Foundation (2024), and published empirical studies on Indonesian cultural dynamics. The framework integrates

Gramsci's hegemony theory, Said's Orientalism, Bhabha's hybridity, Spivak's subaltern studies, and Castells's network society analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Analytical Framework: Hegemony, Resistance, and Postcolonial Negotiation

Figure 1 presents the study's integrative analytical framework, mapping five theoretical traditions against the mechanisms of cultural hegemony, forms of local resistance, and postcolonial negotiation outcomes.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Cultural Hegemony, Postcolonial Theory, and Local Resistance Strategies in Global Interconnectedness			
Theoretical Dimension	Mechanism of Cultural Hegemony	Form of Local Resistance	Postcolonial Negotiation Outcome
Gramsci's Hegemony	Manufactured consent through cultural institutions; normalization of dominant worldview as common sense; subaltern internalization of dominant values	Counter-hegemonic cultural production; subaltern intellectual construction of alternative common sense; reclaiming cultural institutions	War of position: sustained cultural contestation producing hegemonic shifts without direct confrontation; civil society as terrain of struggle
Said's Orientalism & Discourse	Western knowledge systems constructing non-Western Other as inferior; colonial discourse persisting in global media, development language, academic hierarchy	Deconstructing Orientalist representations; asserting epistemic sovereignty; counter-narratives from postcolonial scholars and artists	Contested representations; alternative knowledge hierarchies; recognition of non-Western epistemologies in global academic field
Bhabha's Mimicry & Hybridity	Colonized subjects required to partially replicate colonial culture; mimicry as condition of access to colonial power structures; identity ambivalence	Mimicry as subversive practice: 'almost the same but not quite'; hybridity creates third space disrupting dominant-subordinate binary	Third-space cultural production; hybrid identities that exceed colonial categorization; creative synthesis irreducible to either pole
Spivak's Subaltern & Agency	Subaltern voices excluded from hegemonic discourse structures; speaking positions available only to those who adopt dominant	Strategic essentialism: temporary assertion of collective identity for political purposes; subaltern coalition-building across difference	Limited but real agency within structural constraints; collective mobilization producing material and symbolic gains despite hegemonic containment

	discourse terms		
Digital Resistance (Castells; Lim)	Global digital platforms transmit hegemonic cultural values at scale; algorithm-driven content amplifies dominant culture; digital colonialism	Counter-hegemonic social media movements; indigenous digital media; viral resistance narratives; digital commons construction	Networked social movements challenging cultural hegemony; uneven outcomes dependent on structural access and platform governance
Source: Authors' synthesis adapted from Gramsci (1971/2020), Said (1978/2019), Bhabha (2019), Spivak (2020), Castells (2020), and Lim (2021).			

Source: Authors' theoretical synthesis adapted from Gramsci (2020), Said (2019), Bhabha (2019), Spivak (2020), and Castells (2020).

4.2 Domains of Hegemony and Resistance in Indonesia

Table 1 maps the principal domains of cultural hegemony pressure and local resistance in contemporary Indonesia.

Table 1. Forms of Cultural Hegemony and Local Resistance Strategies in Indonesia's Global Interconnectedness (2018–2024)			
Domain of Hegemonic Pressure	Hegemonic Mechanism	Local Resistance Form	Key Actors & Outcomes
Global Entertainment & Pop Culture (K-Pop, Netflix, Hollywood)	Market saturation by global cultural products; algorithmic amplification of Anglo-Korean content; domestic content marginalized	Kebangkitan konten lokal di TikTok/YouTube; Gerakan 100% Cinta Indonesia; domestic streaming platform Vidio; cultural fusion music	Indonesian content creators among Asia's most followed; local language content growth +340% (2019–2024); Spotify Indonesian music streams +280%
Global Academic & Knowledge Hierarchy	'Publish or perish' in international (Western-indexed) journals; SCOPUS/WoS as quality gatekeepers; English-language dominance in knowledge production	SINTA (national journal index); open access Indonesian journals; Bahasa Indonesia academic publishing; decolonial methodology movements	SINTA journals surpassed 5,000 by 2024; growing Indonesian academic diaspora publishing in both Indonesian and international venues; decolonial curriculum debates in universities
Global Development Discourse (SDGs, Good Governance, Human Rights)	International NGO and donor-driven agenda-setting; 'development' framed through Western	Pancasila-based development framework; gotong royong as alternative development modality; localization of	Indonesia's ICRP (inter-religious cooperation) model internationally recognized; Pancasila-

	liberal assumptions; local priorities subordinated	SDGs through musyawarah mufakat	SDGs integration in national planning documents; BRIN's indigenous knowledge programs
Global Fashion & Beauty Standards	Western/Korean beauty industry standards through social media; colonial beauty hierarchies (skin lightening); global fast fashion displacing local textile	Modest fashion (hijab fashion) industry; batik revival movements; local beauty brand growth; Gerakan Kecantikan Perempuan Indonesia	Indonesia modest fashion industry valued IDR 280T (2024); batik recognized by UNESCO 2009; local beauty brands' market share +18% vs. global brands

Source: Adapted from Kemenparekraf (2024), BRIN (2024), Wahid Foundation (2024), and empirical studies on Indonesian cultural resistance (Lim, 2021; Hasan, 2022).

The evidence presented in Table 1 reveals a consistent pattern that challenges both the cultural imperialism thesis (which predicts that global cultural hegemony will progressively eliminate local cultural forms) and the naive resistance romanticization (which posits that local resistance is always emancipatory and successful). What the evidence shows is a more complex and contextually differentiated picture: in some domains, local resistance has been remarkably effective at constructing counter-hegemonic alternatives (the Indonesian modest fashion industry, the SINTA journal system, the domestic digital content creator ecosystem); in others, hegemonic pressure remains dominant despite pockets of resistance (academic knowledge hierarchy, beauty standards).

4.3 Digital Counter-Hegemony: Indonesia's Cultural Sovereignty Strategy

The most analytically significant development in Indonesian cultural resistance over the past decade has been the emergence of what cultural policy researchers have termed 'digital cultural sovereignty' strategies: deliberate efforts by state and civil society actors to use digital platforms as tools of counter-hegemonic cultural assertion rather than merely as channels through which hegemonic content flows. The growth of the Indonesian digital content creator ecosystem — with Indonesian TikTok and YouTube creators regularly achieving hundreds of millions of views through content that foregrounds Indonesian language, cuisine, music, and cultural humor — represents a significant development in what Gramsci would recognize as the construction of counter-hegemonic cultural leadership.

The Gramscian insight about the 'war of position' is particularly productive here: Indonesian cultural resistance to global hegemony has been most effective not through frontal confrontation with dominant cultural industries but through the patient construction of alternative platforms, audiences, and cultural economies that create the conditions for a gradual shift in cultural common sense. The normalization of hijab as compatible with modern, cosmopolitan, and socially mobile identity — achieved through decades of cultural work by Muslim women artists, fashion designers, media figures, and now social media influencers — is perhaps the most significant example of a successful Gramscian war of position in contemporary Indonesian cultural politics.

4.4 The Limits of Resistance: Structural Constraints on Local Agency

Spivak's critical question — 'Can the subaltern speak?' — remains analytically indispensable as a corrective to overly optimistic accounts of local cultural resistance. While the evidence in Table 1 documents significant areas of successful resistance, it also reveals the structural constraints that limit local agency in the face of global cultural hegemony. The most fundamental constraint is the asymmetric structure of global cultural markets: while Indonesian content creators have achieved remarkable reach within Indonesia and the broader Malay-speaking world, their ability to participate in global cultural markets on equal terms with Western and Korean cultural industries remains severely constrained by language barriers, platform governance structures designed in Western contexts, and the enormous financial resources that dominant cultural industries can bring to content production and distribution.

The academic knowledge hierarchy domain is particularly revealing here. Despite the growth of SINTA-indexed Indonesian journals, the structural logic of global academic evaluation — in which SCOPUS/WoS indexing remains the primary marker of scholarly quality — continues to disadvantage Indonesian researchers working in Bahasa Indonesia and addressing questions of primarily local significance. The 'publish or perish' culture that has penetrated Indonesian universities, driven by government evaluation metrics that weight international publication heavily, reproduces colonial knowledge hierarchies by incentivizing Indonesian researchers to produce knowledge for international audiences in formats designed for Western academic conventions rather than addressing questions most relevant to Indonesian communities.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the dynamics of cultural hegemony and local resistance in the context of global interconnectedness through an integrative framework synthesizing Gramsci, Said, Bhabha, Spivak, and Castells. The analysis has demonstrated that cultural hegemony in the digital era operates through multiple, mutually reinforcing mechanisms — algorithmic amplification, market concentration, knowledge hierarchy, development discourse — that collectively produce structural advantages for dominant cultural industries and values. Local resistance has been most effective in domains where digital platforms can be appropriated as counter-hegemonic infrastructure, where local cultural resources are distinctive and emotionally resonant (Islamic identity, culinary culture, artistic traditions), and where strategic coalitions between state, civil society, and creative industries have invested in sustained counter-hegemonic cultural work.

The postcolonial theoretical framework — particularly Bhabha's hybridity and Spivak's subaltern agency — provides the most adequate conceptual vocabulary for understanding local resistance that is neither purely reactive nor purely assimilationist but represents creative cultural production in the third space of encounter between local and global. Policy implications emphasize the need for state investment in digital cultural infrastructure, academic knowledge sovereignty frameworks, and cultural industry development that supports local creative economies without imposing nationalist rigidity that forecloses creative hybridization.

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