

THE PRACTICE OF MEDIATED PARTICIPATION IN INDONESIAN MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Kurniawan Adi Saputro

Department of Photography, Faculty of Recorded Media, Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Bari Paramarta Islam

Independent researcher, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The question of participation has often been asked as an issue of degree, namely how much members of a society are allowed to have a voice in their collective life. Rather than evaluating the degree of equality reached between actors, this article attempts to identify existing practices that contextualise participation, and thus enable and constrain it. Two case studies, involving marginalised communities in participatory film production, were analysed: a community of believers in a traditional religion (*penghayat*) in Elu Loda and a community of people with disabilities in Salam Rejo. These communities were observed during their participation in film workshops, from October 2018 to February 2019. Fourteen participants, two facilitators, and one programme officer of the sponsor were interviewed. In addition, participants and a selection of community members who interacted with the process were invited to fill in a questionnaire designed to elicit their communicative practices in relation to storytelling, making pictures, and community meetings (Elu Loda $n=49$, Salam Rejo $n=31$). We studied how personal stories were circulated in these groups and how some individuals used the film as a channel to distribute their version of the stories, while still their collective way of storytelling was disconnected from the workshop. Second, we learned that culture shaped how certain people become more visible than the others and how these people developed skills to be more visible, which opened the door to their participation. Third, the participants' embeddedness in their culture and community affected what aspects they were inclined to participate in and for what reason: in the workshop's technical know-how and/or in the content.

KEYWORDS

marginalised communities; media-related practices; participatory media

A PRÁTICA DA PARTICIPAÇÃO MEDIADA EM COMUNIDADES MARGINALIZADAS NA INDONÉSIA

RESUMO

O tema da participação tem sido frequentemente questionado em termos de abrangência, nomeadamente quanto ao número de membros de uma determinada sociedade que têm voz enquanto coletivo. Este artigo, ao invés de avaliar o nível de igualdade entre atores, tenta identificar práticas correntes que contextualizem o processo de participação, tornando-a, desse modo, possível e limitada. Foram analisados dois casos de estudo que envolvem comunidades marginalizadas, durante um projeto de cinema participativo: uma comunidade de fiéis de uma religião tradicional (*penghayat*), em Elu Loda, e uma comunidade de pessoas com necessidades

especiais, em Salam Rejo. Estas comunidades foram observadas durante a sua participação em oficinas de cinema, entre outubro de 2018 e fevereiro de 2019. Foram entrevistados 14 participantes, dois facilitadores e um representante do patrocinador do programa. Além disso, os participantes e alguns membros da comunidade que estiveram envolvidos no processo foram convidados a responder a um inquérito criado com o objetivo de pôr a descoberto as suas práticas comunicativas relacionadas com a narração de histórias (*storytelling*), registos fotográficos e reuniões comunitárias (Elu Loda n=49, Salam Rejo n=31). Estudámos o modo como as histórias pessoais circulavam entre esses grupos e como alguns indivíduos usavam o cinema como veículo de apresentação da sua versão das histórias, enquanto a sua forma coletiva de contar histórias permanecia desligada do workshop (oficina). Percebemos ainda que a cultura formata o modo como algumas pessoas se tornam mais visíveis do que outras e como estas desenvolvem competências para se evidenciarem, o que abriu a porta à sua participação. Por fim, descobrimos que a imersão dos participantes na sua cultura e comunidade afeta os aspetos que despertam mais o seu interesse e por que razão: o saber técnico da oficina e/ou o conteúdo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunidades marginalizadas; média participativos; práticas mediáticas

If I were blind, touch your eyes
 If I were deaf, touch your ears
 If I were lame, wash your feet
 Ephphatha!
 Because I am you
 You are me
 Because we are of one dignity
 Because we are of one plan

This poem was recited by a half-deaf girl who was practising for her performance on “World Disability Day”. The words were inspired by stories from the *Bible*, which people in her community knew well, from their weekly Sunday church service. The poem also borrowed several words from the promotional material of the programme that sponsored the participatory film in which she was involved. The poem is a collage, a patchwork of existing words, both sacred and promotional. Each word is taken from its previous context, but in a clear case of intertextuality, its meaning is transferred into the new text, producing new meanings. It is an apt metaphor for participatory processes, in which participants carry over their experiences and stocks of cultural knowledge and put them together, under the guidance of facilitators. But at the same time, it is only pertinent to ask: Were these participants not already someone before their involvement in a participatory film project? Had they not done something before this? This study is an attempt to answer these questions.

MEDIATED PARTICIPATION AND THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY

The question of participation has often been asked in terms of degree, namely as the question to what degree members of a community or group are allowed to have a voice in their collective life. From a normative perspective, Arnstein (1969) asks what participation is and then elaborates a model that has become, e.g., in development studies and but also in development projects, a classic model of citizen participation. Arnstein's model situates citizens in an antagonistic relationship, which consists out of the powerful and the have-nots; the ladder is arranged vertically to signify the degree of control that citizens have in the decision-making processes. In her view, only the highest three rungs of the ladder count as true participation, whereas the other (lower) six rungs are labelled tokenism or nonparticipation. The model is useful for evaluative and reflective purposes, but, it also has its limits. In Arnstein's own words, the model explicitly does not consider "political socioeconomic infrastructure and knowledge base, plus difficulties of organizing a representative and accountable citizen's group" (1969, p. 217).

Carpentier (2011a, 2011b) proposes a different model of participation, where access and interaction are defined as participation's necessary preconditions, but are still considered to be distinct from participation. For him, access and interaction cannot be equated with participation since those two preconditions lack the critical element of power-sharing. Hence, in the AIP model (Access, Interaction, Participation) Carpentier echoes, in a different way, Arnstein's approach, as he too reserves the space of participation for "real" power struggles, an inevitable consequence of grounding participation in democratic theory. He warns, though, that participation can never be considered a fantastic place where all power struggles have been resolved by a fully equalitarian relationship between all actors. In a contemporary context, the focus is placed on changing elites "to allow for power-sharing" (Carpentier, 2011b, p. 26). His proposal is to focus on the analysis of specific cases, because these participatory processes are "characterised by specific power balances and struggles at different levels, moments, and locations" (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013, p. 267). The aim is to capture participation's "complexity - and the contradictions that trigger it" (2013, p. 267). Complexity seems to be crucial for understanding participation, because of its multidimensional, multilevel, and dynamic nature.

Carpentier (2016) further develops his analytical framework by viewing participation as a process with several subprocesses, sometimes without clear-cut overlaps between these components. In addition to attending to its contingent, multi-layered, and complex characteristics, the model takes the "material and discursive struggles" (2016, p. 77), that are intrinsic to a power struggle, into account. The result is a multicomponent (Carpentier calls them levels) model that consists of the analysis of 1) context (the process and the fields in which the process is situated); 2) actors; 3) decisions; and 4) power relations. He suggests breaking the (analysis of the) participatory event down into

twelve subcomponents. The model is more complex than Arnstein's ladder of participation, or than Carpentier's own AIP model. It is fine-tuned to address the intrinsic issues of participatory analysis and the first attempt to apply it seems to capture what it aims to portray (Yüksek & Carpentier, 2018). The model's strength, in our view, might become its weakness since the model is highly descriptive, complex, and hence will probably be most useful in analyses where the researcher has a deep knowledge of the local context. We see the merit of using such dynamic and complex framework; however, as a reminder, because participation is located in the intersection of theory and practice, it is arguably better to create a meaningful conversation between the two by using less expansive vocabularies, with a strong orientation toward real-world concerns and expectations.

This is a point that also Dagon (2007) makes, when he asserts that participatory projects are inextricably connected to the participants' lives. In his view, reflecting on his decades-long community media activism, participation was used to "refer to a wide diversity of experiences" that can confuse those who "have had little experience at the grassroots level" (Dagon, 2007, p. 197). Further, he warns against the "academic exercise of including some and excluding the rest" and being "not really representative of what is actually happening on the ground" because participation deals with "processes of communication, that is, live social organisms" (Dagon, 2007, p. 198). Rather than using an idealised model, he advocates for models that describe "the struggle of community media as a tool of social change, education, entertainment, socialization of knowledge, economic development, and so on" (Dagon, 2007, p. 202).

According to some of the work done in democratic theory, the best way for citizens to learn about participation is by participating in civic activities (della Porta, 2013). In fact, it was the recognition that "democracy is in crisis" that led some authors to study participation in the first place (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2007; della Porta, 2013). For example, della Porta writes that "saving democracy would mean going beyond its liberal model, broadening reflection on participation and deliberation inside and outside institutions" (2013, p. 2). She pinpoints participation as one of the two – deliberation being the other – defining characteristics of democracy. Couldry, Livingstone and Markham also "look for social preconditions of declining engagement" (2007, p. 14). These studies reflect the authors' deep and long concern about the decline of citizens' political engagement as indicated by low rates of electoral participation.

In our study, we largely follow Dahlgren's (2003) direction, to study civic culture, which is concerned with "how people develop into citizens" (2003, p. 153). This focuses on the daily life of citizens, rather than on the formal procedures of institutionalized politics. This approach is aligned with what Postill (2010) defines as "the embodied sets of activities humans perform with varying degree of regularity, competence and flair" (Postill, 2010, p. 1). We borrow Postill's notion of "media-related practice", and use it – quite loosely – by expanding his definition of media. This expansion means that we view

theatre (with its focus on storytelling), and written documents (in particular in relation to community meetings) as relevant media. These media-related practices were brought together in two participatory film workshops (see below), which became the object of our study. Through the analysis of these workshops, we aim to capture the complexity of participation in an Indonesian context.

PARTICIPATION IN INDONESIA

In the past 20 years, Indonesia has undergone a radical transformation from dictatorship to democracy. Meanwhile, political participation, as measured by party membership, has shown a sharp decline, similar to that in many western democracies. Muhtadi (2018) shows that party membership fell from about 10% in 2004 to 1,5% in 2014. However, electoral turnout had remained steady at 72% when compared to the previous elections (Nurhasim, 2014) and rose to 81% in the 2019 presidential elections. These numbers indicate that Indonesia has experienced some decline in democratic participation, but also that its citizens still believe in the procedures and idea of democracy. There are, however, quite a few differences when comparing Indonesia's political development with that in western democracies. Indonesia's current trajectory of democratisation did not start with the rise of a strong, politically independent and progressive middle class, or any "structural change ahead of democracy" (Törnquist, 2013, p. 6) as some theorists have argued. Rather, it has emerged from a struggle amongst elites, and between them and a host of "dissenting actors, social movements, civil society organisations" (2013, p. 11).

Amongst several criticisms that Törnquist has launched against democratic assessments based on the liberal model, one is particularly relevant here, namely the critique on the "superiority of the liberal democratic model (and the related constitution of the demos and public affairs)" (2013, p. 12). He writes that the model ignores other institutions, "rules and regulations related to participatory democracy, deliberation in Muslim communities or communities run according to customary law" (Törnquist, 2013, p. 13). What Törnquist argues is similar to the position developed by Menchik (2016) in his study of tolerance within the largest three Indonesian Islamic organisations. More specifically, Menchik argues in his book that Indonesian democracy could develop without liberalism. The Indonesian state is, according to Menchik (2016, p. 12) "a religious-secular hybrid that makes the promotion of values like belief in God and communal affiliation a major goal for civil society and the state". Our intention here is not to echo Menchik's argument of the centrality of religion in Indonesia, but to disentangle the concept of participation from its roots in liberal political theory, in which individual rights and identities are of utmost importance and serve as the basis of one's interest in taking part in decision-making processes. We follow and expand Menchik's argument that the strict

separation between individual and communal issues is not a universal phenomenon, and, in many places, communal concerns take precedence over the individual ones. In addition, it is the individuals' involvement and the deployment of their skills in communal and cultural activities that prepare them for their participation, in the maximalist sense of the concept (Carpentier, 2011a). What we want to argue here is largely similar to Dahlgren's (2003, 2006) view of culture and everyday life as the "training ground" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 272) for participation. The difference lies in our emphasis on specific practices that are communally accepted and reinforced, and that provide participants with the motivations, identities, and skills to enter into and be able to fully engage in participation processes.

In our study, we want to focus on participatory video, which has been used in Indonesia since the 1980s, by activists and media professionals, as a method for people's empowerment. The Kunci Cultural Studies Center and Engage Media (2009) surveyed the landscape of participatory video and found that it was quite sparse, consisting only of three organisations that specialised in participatory video production. However, many more production workshops have been held by civil society organisations that were run on an ad hoc basis, although documentation about these workshops is often lacking. The participatory video project that we studied was part of a larger program where the Indonesian coordinating ministry of social welfare had been working in partnership with the Asia Foundation, with the Australian government's financial support, to widen access for those who were structurally marginalised, in a variety of ways.

Its programme officer said that, for this project, they were actually experimenting with the medium of participatory video since they had never before substantially used the genre of the feature film in their work (interview on 13/10/2018). The experiment was motivated by the unexpected success of a book-writing workshop about the history of the village of Salam Rejo where *penghayat kepercayaan*, believers in a traditional and "unofficial" religion¹, lived. This book-writing workshop, held in 2017, ran for more than six months and involved 15 teenagers who were trained to interview key informants about the history of certain landmarks, cultural practices, and founding members of their village. It resulted in a local history publication, in the form of a pocket book, that was then distributed for free to the people of the village. Although fraught with delays and disagreements over the accuracy of the book's narrative and the choice of informants, its final version was accepted with the acknowledgement of the village administration and the village's key figures. The interview process that allowed teenagers to interact with people outside their own groups, and the village meetings with different groups that were organised to discuss the results, created a sense of togetherness. The local religious leader in the Salam Rejo village took part in directing the project, provided information regarding the history of their village, and was profiled in the book as one of

¹ Indonesia has six official religions (*agama*), including Islam and Protestantism, but also a large number of non-official religions (*kepercayaan*). The latter sometimes face marginalisation in Indonesia (see Crouch, 2016, Mutaqin, 2014).

the elders of the village. When the book was finally finished, it was highly appreciated by other villages in the same regency² and their village head was frequently invited to give talks about the project, and to make suggestions on similar projects. The believers were given a seat in development consultations at the level of the regency, and have worked with other groups (mostly adherents of Islam, the major official religion of Indonesia) to create economic initiatives, related to village tourism and food catering.

The book project inspired the programme officer to consider other media forms, to document and portray how frictions and exclusions work in the everyday life of marginalised groups. It is difficult to capture this adequately in programme reports, which focuses on the indicators, whether or not a programme has met its objectives. Without recognising and acknowledging that some groups were barred from participation, or from public services, due to their identity, and without rendering the conflicts and the tolerance visible, their voices would not be heard. Telling their story in the form of book, and then a film, was seen as a form of struggle because in certain cases the fight was not only structural, but also symbolic.

THE CASE STUDY

The Asia Foundation partnered with the NGO Tumbuh Sinema Rakyat [Tumbuh the People's Cinema] to recruit communities of *penghayat* in Salam Rejo, which is part of the Kulon Progo regency on the island of Java, and communities of people with disabilities in the village of Elu Loda, situated in the Sumba Barat [West Sumba] regency on the island of Sumba. The workshops lasted from mid-October 2018 until February 2019. The feature film format was chosen because its long duration afforded the inclusion of different people and a representation of the variety of circumstances in which different challenges manifested themselves. However, the film format also presented specific challenges, at the narrative and technical level. Consequently, the participants only took part in the pre-production and production phases, whereas the post-production phase was under the full control of Tumbuh Sinema Rakyat. The reasons for this decision was that the sponsorship brought about time limitations for the project, and that the technical masteries that were required for the post-production phase were considered to be beyond the participants' capabilities.

One workshop was conducted with fourteen disabled and non-disabled members of the Elu Loda community in the West Sumba regency. It is relatively underdeveloped and underserviced when compared to the western part of the country, where economic development is concentrated. The village of Elu Loda lies on karst hills and its lack of fresh water meant that its people, including children, have to walk or use their motorcycles to fetch one or two cans of water. The houses are built using low-cost manufactured

² Regencies are second-level administrative units in Indonesia, directly situated underneath a province.

materials, such as concrete brick for the walls and zinc for the roof, rather than the wood and palm leaves that were used in the past. The village is quite new; only seven years ago it became a separate administrative entity, being separated from a larger village. The people mostly live off the land, growing corn, upland rice, soy, and caladium roots, which mainly serve their own subsistence. In addition, they habitually, rather than industrially, raise pigs, which could be found at every house and are also used in rituals. Since their daily lives revolve around their land, which does not need intensive care, they generally live unhurriedly and have ample time for socialising.

The second workshop was conducted in Salam Rejo and involved thirteen people, consisting of *penghayat* and non-*penghayat*. Salam Rejo has the characteristic look of a community in transition, shifting from a rural and traditional way of life to an urban and modern lifestyle. In general, the houses are largely constructed from manufactured components, such as cement, glass, concrete bricks, steel, and ceramics. The majority of village residents no longer relies on their land for their livelihood. They work as manual labourers, craft producers, contract workers for the local government, or selling different types of services. Since many of the participants are still young, they went to school in their regency and to university in Yogyakarta, the province capital, riding motorcycles on the smooth asphalt road that connected their village to other parts of the province. Their daily life cycle followed the rhythm of urban work hours, from eight in the morning to four in the afternoon, making it rather hard to allocate a convenient time for the workshop.

THE WORKSHOPS

The workshops started with teaching the basic concepts of audio-visual storytelling, where participants created a simple plot. Then participants learnt how to tell a story by writing their own story or by “interviewing” another participant and writing up his or her story, and then vice versa. The personal stories were related to the theme of the workshop, namely inclusiveness in society. Next, the facilitator-cum-director considered all these stories, and the authors of those stories (called story owners) that were considered to have potential were then invited to a small workshop to provide more details. He then brought all these different stories into a coherent narrative, which included more than one storyline. He used the participants’ core story lines, core characters, but put them in a new story world. Rather than being a full movie script, the end result of this process was a story treatment, comprising scenes that specified the characters, their actions, location, and time, without dialogue. This was a method intended to reduce the production time and budget, and the participants’ workload. Furthermore, the approach involved using real characters (story owners), real locations (with minimal modification), local language, and their own dress and make-up.

The story owners were (partially) anonymised in the film by adopting new, fictional names. However, other participants and the community knew that the film was about his or her real life. After all, the film was intended for a larger audience, the workshop would eventually result in the participants' private lives being revealed to the public. Moreover, as this article will point out later, the films were an opportunity that the marginalised communities could (and would) use to their advantage. Locations were sought in the participants' local areas and selected based on how convincing these houses and other locations were in relation to the story and characters, in combination with artistic considerations pertaining to the film. For example, many shots were taken in outdoor locations in Sumba, which is known for its vast savannah, blue sky, and dry environment, so that it was convincing that the film scenes were set on this island, with these shots also having an aesthetic dimension. In addition, the local language was used in both films, although in Sumba not all film facilitators spoke that local language, which meant that they had to consult with a local interpreter to gauge the dialogue, and in the end relied more on the authenticity of the actors' expressions. Their authentic dress and make-up also created a more local look and greater credibility of their characters for the films' audiences, although sometimes the actors needed guidance when they became slightly over-enthusiastic and dressed themselves up more than was required.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This research asks what and how existing community practices are connected with the participatory film workshops. To obtain a fuller understanding of the communities and appropriately locate the workshop within the participants' daily life, participant observations were conducted during almost four months of the process. The first author (of this article) observed the workshop in Salam Rejo, from preparation to production (himself only minimally participating), whereas the second author observed both the Elu Loda and Salam Rejo workshops, with moderate participation as a temporary crewmember and also as a cast member with a small role. During the observations, the authors took notes on the processes and conducted mostly individual, semi-structured interviews with participants ($n=14$), asking them about their previous media-related practices (story-telling, making images, and community meetings) and how the new skills were already, or were going to be, incorporated into their lives. The interviewees were selected based on their intensity of participation in the workshops and their time availability. Due to the authors' language limitation, Elu Loda informants were interviewed in Indonesian, which for some of them presented considerable difficulties, whereas Salam Rejo informants were interviewed in Indonesian or Javanese, whichever was easier for them. In addition, we interviewed, and had discussions with, often in informal settings, the director, a facilitator of the participatory film project, and the senior programme officer from the

donor organisation. Many follow-up interviews were conducted, by private messaging, to verify and obtain fuller details in relation to our observations.

Interview and observation are common data collection methods in the studies of participation *in* and *through* media (see for example Carpentier, 2011a; Evans et al. 2009; Gutberlet, 2008; Mistry, Bignante & Berardi, 2014; Singh, High, Lane & Oreszczyn, 2017). Furthermore, some authors also used diary writing to gain insight into the subjects' experience in temporal dimension (Couldry et al., 2007; Shaw, 2016). Survey methods are less often employed in these researches, possibly due to their aim of revealing insights into the subject's experience rather than portraying their general characteristics (in contrast with, for example, Couldry et al., 2007). In this study, a survey is used to better grasp the practices of the larger communities wherein the two participatory video projects were situated.

Participants and some community members who interacted with/in the process were invited to fill in a questionnaire designed to elicit their habits of storytelling, making pictures, and community meetings (Elu Loda $n=49$, Salam Rejo $n=31$). Using a convenience sample, the community members who lived close to the shooting locations and attended community meetings were selected. This created similar characteristics for the participants, in terms of sex, age, and educational background, although there were difference between the two villages. For example, in Elu Loda the selected participants were older ($M=38$), than those in Salam Rejo ($M=26$). This difference also applied to the workshop participants. This convenience sample was not designed, and cannot claim, to be representative of the whole population, but the survey was necessary to ground our interpretation. The questionnaire statements ($n=26$) were grouped into inquiries about their speaking habits, their writing habits, their involvement with the community, and their multimedia-specific skills, namely making photographs and video recordings.

Numeric data were analysed to describe the community's media-related practices. Furthermore, the interview transcripts and field notes were systematically coded to understand the two communities' practices before the workshop took place and how they incorporated the new skills they had acquired from the workshop. As our analysis is embedded in the workshop project, our findings are mostly applicable to the workshop participants, rather than to the larger community.

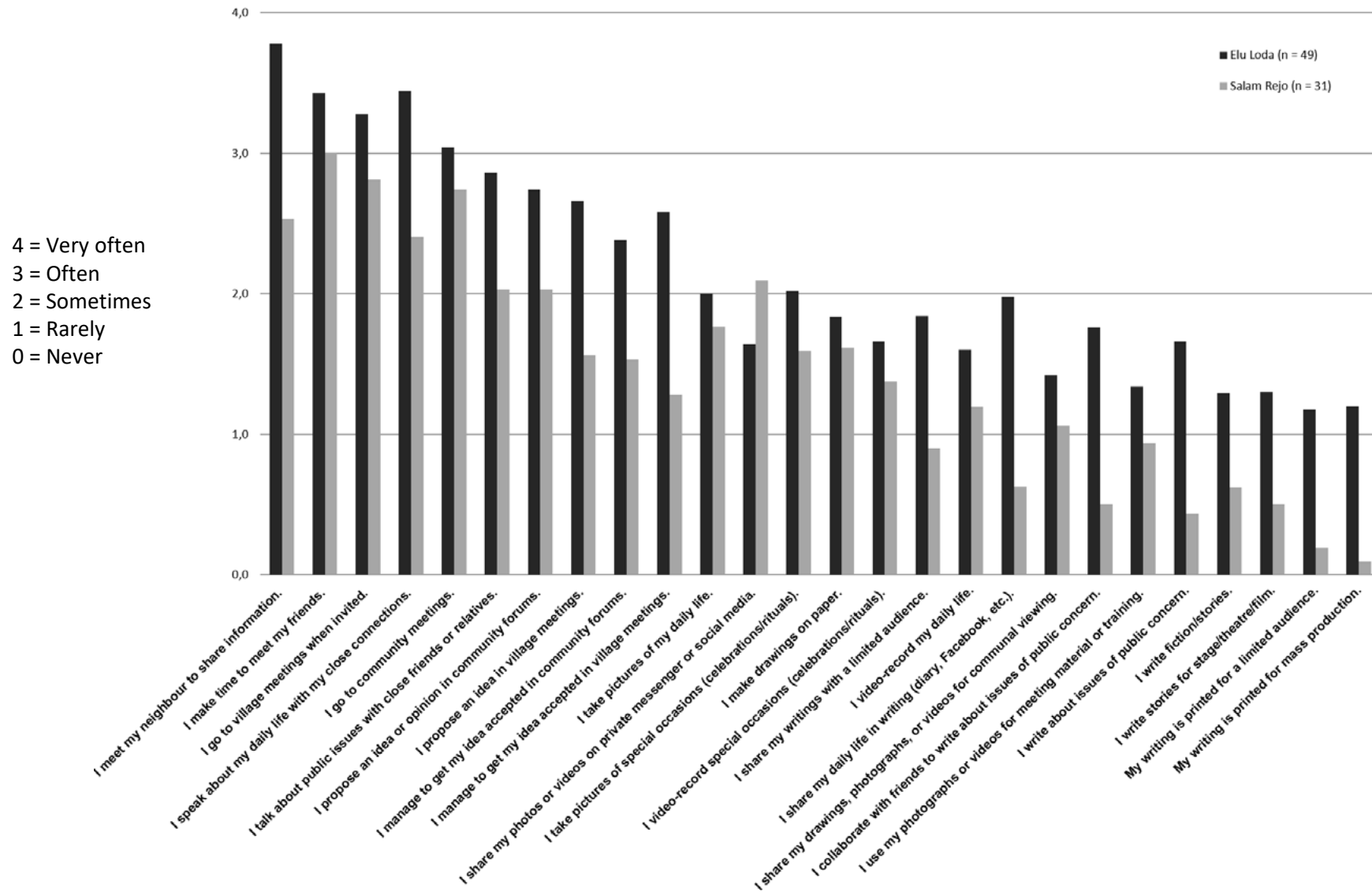
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND MEDIA-RELATED PRACTICES

Based on our survey in both communities, we obtained a rough picture of both communities, their similarities and differences, in terms of how the community members participate on issues of common concern.

Our initial observations made it quickly clear that community members in Elu Loda and Salam Rejo naturally focused on issues affecting their own communities and situated

within their immediate social surroundings. The questionnaire responses show clearly that the meetings with their closest family and neighbours were the activities that had the high frequencies (see Graph 1). Slightly less frequent, although still categorised as “often”, was joining in community and village meetings, which means that, for Elu Loda and Salam Rejo members, their community was important as well. When comparing both cases, Elu Loda community members are seen to have scored higher on communal activities. They actively contributed suggestions and followed the decision-making processes in community meetings, whereas Salam Rejo community members still chose to be present, but were less active in these meetings. This might be due to the fact that the Salam Rejo’s respondents were younger ($M=26$) and therefore might not consider themselves as full members of their community, whereas the Elu Loda respondents, being older ($M=38$), were more likely to be fully embedded in the life of their community.

Face-to-face meetings and immediate forms of interaction were still the respondents’ cardinal means of participation in public life, whereas other media-related practices were less frequently used. Elu Loda respondents “sometimes” wrote about public issues and “sometimes” it reached a limited audience. It was beyond the bounds of their daily lives to think of reaching wider and more general audiences, discussing public issues. Based on our observations and the survey data, we know that they used smart phones to browse and chat on Facebook and private messaging services, enabled by recently installed telecommunication services, in addition to communally watching soap operas at night, due to the limited number of television sets in the village. The authors’ observations and interviews revealed that they seemed to be more interested in soap operas than evening news. Respondents in Salam Rejo were slightly less interested in mediated participation with public issues (Couldry et al., 2007) than those in Elu Loda. Respondents in Salam Rejo sometimes used their smartphones to take pictures and videos of their immediate surroundings or special events, but only rarely in relation to public issues. We will explore their reasons later, but it is clear from the survey that access to and interaction with (Carpentier, 2011a, 2011b) a wide variety of media were no longer a problem to Salam Rejo respondents, yet participation in public issues was still beyond the horizon of their attention and interest.



Graph 1: Media-related practices of Elu Loda and Salam Rejo community

It is safe to infer, based on the survey data, that the media practices in which the respondents engaged were shaped by their communal life, especially in the case of the Elu Loda respondents. Geographically, Elu Loda was also more “isolated” from the city; although it was already connected to the regency capital, economic activities were more oriented toward their communal life, and those with the city were sparse. On the other hand, Salam Rejo was economically and geographically connected to Yogyakarta and other regencies within the province with better and wide-reaching infrastructure. For this reason, and also because Salam Rejo respondents were mainly young, they were less defined by their communal life. Although they scored differently on the degrees of intensity, in both cases media-related practices were not merely based on personal preferences exercised by unconnected individuals, as they often are in more urban and western societies. Rather, these media-related practices were informed by the community as to what was considered relevant or not, and what was perceived as normal or not. For example, it was highly implausible for Elu Loda community members to become youtubers or vloggers on other platforms, although the technical instruments and infrastructure allowed them to do this, at least to an extent. What was missing was the motivation – no one would encourage or appreciate it, at least at the moment – to try these new forms of expression and to make contact with (potential) audiences (which might come mainly from the outside). This was different from the attitude among the Salam Rejo youth who did not see anything extraordinary in being youtubers, with at least one participant trying to become one. Yet, their more communal practice of film-making was meant to be watched by their friends in the village, even though uploaded to YouTube. Another indicator of their sense of communality, and the limits of their field of practice, was that all of their amateur videos were shot within the area of their village and were about their own community.

The differences between the two communities in which media they preferred, but the similarities in the limits to their attention, underscore the question of “participation in what”. The kinds of practices that communities accept as normal, or even desirable, serve as reference points for individuals who are socialised to consider, accept, modify, ignore, or reject. This is not an argument for cultural determinism, where culture is *the* underlying force that determines identities, agendas and behaviours. But it is also unreasonable to think of individuals as disconnected from their social contexts and individually creating their own predispositions, tastes, subjectivities, and values. Instead, we argue for taking the middle road, by positing that through the lens of media-related practices we can see participation as part of larger processes, not a single event, with processes that are layered and that unfold themselves in a longer temporal dimension. The concept of practice focuses our attention on what is a quite structured, embodied, and stable engagement with the world (Postill, 2010). Rather than analysing the struggle between asymmetric power holders, we look at the asymmetry in relation to the skills that individuals hold through regular practices long before the participatory processes under analysis took place.

These practices are grouped into three types, each focusing on particular aspects of the media-related practices that are relevant to participatory film-making. First, film-making is concerned with the story, as it is essentially what strings together shots (with their images and sounds) into a film. In the case of these particular workshops, due to their method of collecting bits of story from participants' experiences and weaving them into more extended narratives, it is important to analyse the communities' practice of telling personal stories. Second, embodiment and how individuals present themselves, to be seen by others, are important to understand how these amateur actors successfully act in these films. Finally, their practice of participating in community meetings is analysed to understand the choices they made regarding how they want to be represented in the film. The data for these different analyses came from the field notes and semi-structured interviews with participants and workshop crew members.

PERSONAL STORIES AND COLLECTIVE STORYTELLING

Living in a communal society means sharing more of what we normally consider to be private, with others, including property, food, time, and personal stories. The act of sharing personal stories does not have to be deliberate since the web of connections between the community members is usually dense enough to allow bits and pieces of information to circulate to the peripheries. This point was supported by some participants; they claimed not to like or easily share their personal stories but the workshop facilitators were able to obtain details of their stories from almost anyone else in the group (male facilitator, interview on 21/12/2018). The major problem for the owners of such stories was not their distribution, since it was preventable nor stoppable. The problem was that they felt that they did not have control over their stories. The film's narrative, which was woven with their personal stories, provided an opportunity, though. It was exemplified by one participant: The film allowed her to tell "the real story of my [life]" and what she had been yearning to tell was "finally heard" (female participant, interview, 10/1/2019). Another participant also entrusted the story she had tried to keep to herself, although further observation confirmed that others already knew about it, at least partly (female participant, interview on 22/11/2018). In the workshop, the facilitators tended to gravitate more toward those who revealed more about themselves, since this would provide enough material for them to work with, in order to produce a more complete narrative plot. The participants who contributed their personal stories were aware that in the future this film would be viewed by strangers and anonymous audiences. This caused them anxiety, which in one case prompted the story owner, a divorcee, to negotiate with the film director, outside of the forum, what parts should be included and how she would be depicted. Actually, they had composed their own version of the story during the story workshop, but the director often added narrative elements to make the characters believable and relatable to audiences. These additions were not necessarily based on reality because the end result would be presented and promoted as fiction. This tension between

participants and workshop facilitators was a lingering issue, which was resolved in this particular case (with the agreement of both parties), but demonstrated the need for more developed deliberative-participatory framework to resolve these kind of discrepancies and tensions in a more structural way.

At the collective level, interesting similarities and contrasts emerged between the Elu Loda and the Salam Rejo communities, including both the marginalised and the non-marginalised members. These two communities had developed some practices that they could use in order to speak about their community. The Elu Loda community was relatively homogenous in its religious practice, with the Protestant church as its central institution. As part of its religious rituals, for example, during their Easter and Christmas services, they produced short dramas based on relevant pericopes from the *Bible*. The workshop participants expressed their enjoyment in playing roles in these dramas but also their struggles to memorise the dialogue. The same cultural narrative was also developed by Salam Rejo community, in the form of the local history book that was mentioned earlier, and which was about their origins, their places of collective memory, and the founding members of their community. The book became a foundation for their successive cultural celebrations and efforts to promote inclusivity, such as the National Festival of Local Wisdom and annual village day. However, in both films this potential remained untapped. The workshop film did not use the elements related to Elu Loda's religious drama, either its artistic forms or the story. The participants' previous acting experiences (in their local drama) were not explored or used further. The same happened with Salam Rejo's local history. While the book-writing workshop was successful in enabling the participants to move forward with a more inclusive agenda, their rich stories and characters were not incorporated in the film.

This is a missed opportunity since the Elu Loda community still produces these dramas. If they would have been used and adapted in the film, the community could then have used their film workshop experience to further develop their religious drama. This would be a more realistic alternative, instead of making more films of their own, which would be very difficult for them, considering their lack of technical and economic resources. In contrast, Salam Rejo's practice of writing their cultural history has stopped. Some of the young amateur "historians" have left their village to pursue higher education and better employment opportunities. Interviews with those who participated in both the local history workshop and the film workshop revealed that they were no longer practising their writing skills (male and female participants, interview on 9/1/2019). Their new institutional environment required nor supported their former practice.

We can see from the examples that the cultural practice of storytelling, both at the personal and the collective level, has trained the community members to participate in film production. It has enabled them and, at the same time, structured their choices into what is culturally acceptable and how to do it. In a communal society, telling one's personal story is both a personal and social, if uncoordinated, decision. Oftentimes, this puts individuals into the defensive position of trying to mitigate the damage that social

storytelling has done to their reputation. However, existing practices of collective storytelling can also be incorporated into participatory media processes, to the community's benefit, once they have mastered the skills and the narrative.

VISIBILITY AND SOCIAL CASTING

The initial design of this research attempted to explore how people adopted different technologies to create visual images, that these people then used to participate in public discourse about their common concerns. However, the survey and observations revealed that these technologies were only minimally used to address public issues. In addition to the lack of attention as an explanation for this, one participant offered another – quite revealing – reason. The former leader of the youth organisation in Salam Rejo said that he dared not raise attention to social issues for fear of inciting negative comments from other people. He only used it for posting news of cultural events as part of his job role in the village administration (male participant, interview, 9/1/2019). Because of this finding, the authors then shifted their attention to the related question of how participants made themselves visible to the public, inside and outside of the film workshop. This question is relevant for two reasons. One is that publicness requires visibility of the agents (Sorlin quoted in Dayan, 2001, p. 746) and the other reason is that the medium of film itself is visual. Thus, visibility to the naked eye and to the camera's eye is constitutive for participation in public issues through film.

The disabled community members of Elu Loda were previously situated in an unfavourable position since they had remained hidden by their families until after a campaign initiated by NGO activists only seven years before (female participant, interview on 13/11/2018; female participant, interview on 30/11/18). Not everyone was discouraged by their family's feelings of shame and one member, at least, managed to gain a basic education, earn a living and to build a family himself (male participant, interview on 27/11/2018). However, generally, the disabled community members had previously been relatively invisible, except for two siblings who were albinos. They were easily noticed in public and felt no inhibition about participating in public activities, only hindered by their hypersensitivity of direct sunlight, which was aplenty in Sumba. The community perceived them as "almost normal" because, although their hair and skin looked abnormal to them, white skin was esteemed locally. Furthermore, somehow these siblings had developed a different and more fashionable style of dress as compared to the community standards. Not only the young female's willingness to provide a very complete description of her life story, but also hers and her brother's albino skin and fashionable clothing made them stars of the Elu Loda film. We would argue that it was not their physical appearance per se that made them noticeable, but their difference from the others, which was largely a cultural construction. Theoretically speaking, the same condition, in a different context, would have yielded different outcomes. Because this particular film told stories of disabled people, the siblings were, more than others, asymmetrically

positioned to participate. Based on the combination of their skin condition and skilled practice of dressing they were almost impossible not to include.

There were also other examples of how the evaluation of physical appearance is cultural, but also how it generated particular predispositions in relation to this film workshop. The casting of the Salam Rejo film happened at the same time as the director was weaving together the story threads. As the director elaborated the story details, developing more characters and scenes, the cast grew. The casting principle was either to mould the film characters to fit the person, or to look for a person with similar characteristics to the character. Usually the film crew went down the first route, since all of the actors and actresses were amateurs. However, for the Salam Rejo film, the crew wished to include a fictional character, someone who looked good on camera and would provide the film with a modern and fresh appearance so that the issue of traditional religion would not be negatively associated with backwardness and primitivism. They initially selected one young woman to play the character, but the way she presented herself was considered not modern and fresh (enough). They then invited workshop participants to nominate their friends and acquaintances. In response, the participants browsed their picture folders and social media accounts on their smartphones and put forward what they thought to be suitable candidates. This process of browsing through the photographs, finding the ones that were considered to match the criteria (good-looking and outgoing), and then proposing and discussing the candidates again, show how visibility and values of good-lookingness work together in order to open the door for participation. In the casting, the selected candidate proved to be adept at presenting herself before the camera, as indicated by her various items of clothing that could be mixed and matched, to create differences in her appearance. Again, the point here is not about her intrinsic qualities, but about her relative difference from the others, and how this was perceived and appreciated, that made her impossible to overlook.

BEING AND PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY

As was stated earlier, one characteristic shared by both cases was the participants' engagement in communal life, although this varied in intensity. Workshop participants did not relinquish their social standing upon entering the workshop; on the contrary, once inside, they reproduced and continued to draw on their social standing. The Elu Loda community had, to some degree, solved their problem with the social inclusion of disabled people, at least to the point where they had appointed a person with a disability as leader of the neighbourhood association, and disabled people were represented in the consultations on development planning, from the village to the regency level. Hence, the disabled participants were more interested in the technical aspects of the production rather than in the film's theme. For example, acting without beforehand memorising the dialogues left quite an impression on many participants, due to their experience with acting for drama. On the other hand, the Salam Rejo community had only started to work on

equal opportunities during the past two years, after their successful collaboration with the village administration to publish the local history book. The community of *penghayat* was also starting to be invited into the development plan meetings, again from the village up to the regency level. However, underlying this promising turn of events was a lack of cooperation between the adherents of the official religion and the believers of the traditional religion. Whereas the process of story development in Elu Loda went smoothly, it was more protracted in the Salam Rejo workshop, with more intense discussions, formal and informal, between the sponsor, the community, and the film professionals. The point of disagreement was mostly centred around the question whether love stories in the film would end in break-ups, or in the submission of one belief to another. A liberal solution of leaving the matter to the individuals was just not an option. This was because break-ups would be interpreted as promoting exclusivity, rather than inclusivity, whereas submission would be interpreted as inequality amongst beliefs. At the end, an agreement was reached to end the movie without full resolution, so that the audience would take the question home rather than responding to it with agreement or disagreement.

Javanese communal values which prioritise harmony rather than open conflict have shaped the way that the equalisation of power relationships works. We agree with Menchik (2016) that different religious communities are essentially tied together in an agnostic relationship, at least in terms of their truth claims, but in reality the believers want their social life to be in harmony. For example, the *penghayat* did not find problems in mixing their rituals with those of the Protestants. They tend to prefer not to have their belief stated on their ID, although the law now allows them to do that. Why is it important to discuss this in relation to the issue of participatory film making? Because this was exactly what the Salam Rejo community members communicated during the workshop as an important issue. According to some participants this was also important for the period after the film's production, when the result is screened and the participants symbolically 'make their case' in front of the larger communities. It goes beyond the technicalities of film-making and how much they are allowed to participate in the production; it has to do with their core identity and their core relationship with their community. In other words, the question of participation in participatory film involves not only how groups, positioned in differential power relations, work together on a collective project, but also how the relationships with other, more antagonistic, groups will work beyond the workshop. After all, the aspiration of the participants was to communicate a positive image of the *penghayat*, rather than disrupting the harmony in the communities where they live. From the participants' viewpoint, their embeddedness in their social relationships, before, during, and after the workshop, both with their fellow participants and with their communities outside of the workshop setting is of the utmost importance for them.

When the workshops were over, the participants returned to their former social positions, as village officers in Elu Loda, members or leaders of the youth organisation in Salam Rejo, NGO activists, or regular residents in one of the two communities. In these capacities and roles, they already knew how to navigate, negotiate, and accommodate

different interests in various settings, such as in consultative meetings on development planning, in organising festivals, administering public services in the village, and organising protests. The participatory film workshops provided them with additional technical and rhetorical skills that they could then use for individual and/or collective purposes, such as economic and career advancement, identity cohesion, self-representation, and, not least, artistic enjoyment. It is in these various regards that the importance of participation – we would like to argue – can be appropriately evaluated. And, we should add, the equalisation of power is not a purely formal measure (where everyone is allocated a vote), or considered culture-free.

CONCLUSION

This article argues that we need to better understand the preconditions that shape the structure and dynamics of participation. Our two case studies explored the cultural practices that connected individuals with the public world, and there are three key findings that came out of our analysis. The first finding concerns how personal stories circulated in these communal groups and how some individuals used the films as a channel to distribute their perspectives. The communal ways of storytelling, that were used in the village before (drama and local history writing) gained little from the workshops, as the films did not sufficiently use and integrate them, thereby disconnecting the films from the already existing communicative practices. Second, these two case studies demonstrated that culture shaped the participants' opportunities for visibility, and how some participants developed the skills to become more visible, which further facilitated their participation. Third, the participants' belonging to their culture and community transcended the temporal frame of these workshops. In other words, there was community life before and after the films. This affected what they wanted to participate in, for what reasons, and whether they were more interested in the technical know-how and/or the content. These practices of storytelling, becoming visible and community life are cultural aspects that deeply impacted on the community members' position in the participatory film workshops. Marginalised communities and facilitators need to engage with these three practices, on their own or in collaboration with others, in order to maximize the benefits gained from their involvement in participatory processes. On the basis of our two case studies, we argue for situating participation within wider and long-term community practices, to avoid that participation becomes seen as an end in itself, instead as a practical framework to achieve individual, communal, and common goals.

At the same time, our analysis demonstrated that the participation of marginalised communities in media production remains important, for two reasons. First, their participation provides the external world with an opportunity to listen to their voices, which otherwise would not have been as authentic or as precise if they were spoken on behalf of them. Second, participants are able to learn new skills, that they can use, later on, to negotiate their relations with dominant groups. Finally, research on participation

and participatory research are also relevant for the academic community itself, as these types of research keep the study of media, communication, and culture grounded in the perspective, and in the interests, of those who participate. It forces us to remember what our research is all about. ✍

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Kurniawan Adi Saputro holds a PhD in Communication Science from Sheffield Hallam University, in the United Kingdom. His main interest is uncovering the audiences' agency in different context, especially in a crisis. He is a lecturer at the Department of Photography, Faculty of Recorded Media, Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5202-0017>

Email: kurniawan.as@isi.ac.id

Address: Jl. Suryodiningratan No. 8, Yogyakarta 55143, Indonesia

Bari Paramarta Islam is an independent researcher who actively promotes visual literacy to students of secondary schools through the use of photography.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3744-9840>

Email: paramartabari@gmail.com

Address: Tawangsari RT 02 RW 02, Kadilanggon Wedi, Klaten, Indonesia

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