Becoming Imperceptible as a Means to Experience Freedom in Papua: Reading Hidden Transcripts from Black Brothers to Contemporary Papuan Music

Iriano Yedija Petrus Awom
irianodavid@gmail.com
Universitas Papua

Abstract

This paper examines how Papuan music, from the pioneering group Black Brothers in the late 1970s to contemporary musicians on digital platforms, articulates strategies of resistance and freedom through the politics of imperceptibility. Departing from the dominant framework of memoria passionis that often positions Papua solely within narratives of suffering and victimhood, I argue that Papuan songs enact a form of freedom by becoming imperceptible to the gaze of state power.

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-imperceptible" and James C. Scott's theory of "hidden transcripts," this study analyses selected songs by Black Brothers alongside works by contemporary Papuan artists circulating on YouTube, Spotify, and social media. Rather than staging direct confrontation, these songs employ metaphor, coded language, spiritual imagery, and seemingly apolitical themes of love, land, and faith. I demonstrate that this aesthetic choice functions as a continuous survival strategy across generations: by remaining indirect and ambiguous, the music circulates widely while evading censorship and repression.

Through close reading and cultural-historical analysis, this paper reveals how imperceptibility operates not as silence or defeat, but as an active political practice. From cassette tapes to digital streaming, these songs create alternative spaces where Papuan identity, memory, and longing for autonomy can be expressed and preserved outside colonial and nationalist binaries.

By reading music as a site of political practice, this paper offers a way to hear resistance that is coded, embodied, and indirect. It argues that freedom in Papua is not only claimed through visibility, but also performed through sonic strategies of becoming imperceptible. Ultimately, Papuan music exemplifies how art can become a means to experience freedom even under conditions of surveillance and control.

Keywords: hidden transcript; becoming-imperceptible; Papuan music; politics of resistance

Introduction

1. Papua Between Visibility and *Memoria Passionis*

In his song *Misteri Kehidupan*, Arnold Ap wrote:

> *"Andai saja aku burung Elang, terbang tinggi, mata menelusur. Tapi sayangnya nasib burung sial. Jadi buruan... yang kudamba, yang kunanti tiada lain hanya kebebasan* - If only I were an eagle, flying high, eyes scanning. But unfortunately, the fate of an unlucky bird. To be hunted... what I long for, what I wait for is nothing but freedom."

This lyric in Bahasa is straightforward. It describes a person whose life is hunted, imprisoned, and who longs for freedom but is killed. Implicitly, this is a portrait of the Papuan people themselves. However, such straightforwardness is an exception. Most Papuan songs work in a coded and metaphorical way. In the tradition of subordinate or oppressed communities, this indirectness is a method that James Scott calls the hidden transcript, a hidden discourse to make criticism while avoiding retaliation because of their vulnerable position (Scott, 1990).[1] This pattern is clearly visible in the Biak singing tradition which is rich in its gnomic function (Awom, 2025).[2]

In the song *Arbanya Ifo Amsam*, Ap hides his message behind nature and marine animals. For outside listeners, it only sounds like a song about the sea, but for the Biak community as an ingroup, the message is read cognitively and affectively as a story of suffering. The same pattern appears in Sam Kapisa's song "Manyei Sima," which juxtaposes a bird character with a leader figure in Papua, a figure with a tragic fate, hunted and killed as in Ap's songs. Both songs use metaphorical expressions inspired by Biak ecological life and contain elements of metaphor, anonymity, and euphemism as a hidden transcript (Awom, 2025). This pattern is not an aesthetic coincidence, but a cultural strategy. Papuan people, who are rich in oral tradition, have a gnomic tradition: elders give advice through poetic figurative language. Songs are not only beautiful in sound, but store wisdom, moral and spiritual values in symbolic, brief, yet piercing language.

This strategy was born from historical vulnerability. Historically, the body of the Papuan people had been imprisoned before their words came out. Stigmas such as OPM, not nationalist, separatist, to terrorist have long silenced the space for expression (Chauvel, 2005[3]; Glazebrook, 2008[4];Kusumaryati, 2021). In a situation where freedom of speech is restricted, criticism must find an efficient and covert channel. Singing becomes that space.

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[1] Scott, J. C. (1990). Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts. Yale University Press.

[2] Awom, I. Y. P. (2025). Cognitive poetic analysis of hidden transcript in two selected songs by Sam Kapisa and Arnold Ap. Jurnal Bahasa Indonesia Prima (BIP), 7(2), 120–133. https://doi.org/10.34012/bip.v7i2.7146

[3] Chauvel, R. (2005). Constructing Papuan nationalism: History, ethnicity, and adaptation (Policy Studies No. 14). East-West Center Washington.

[4] Glazebrook, D. (2008). Permissive residents: West Papuan refugees living in Papua New Guinea. ANU E Press.

The relationship between Papua and the Indonesian state has indeed been long and complicated since the integration process in the 1960s (see Chauvel, 2005; Glazebrook, 2008; Kusumaryati, 2021[5]). Power inequality accompanied by discriminatory policies gave birth to continuous protests and resistance. Ironically, the state often does not read these protests as the voice of citizens, but as acts of treason that threaten the integrity of the nation. Its response is silencing: imprisonment, loss of life, and violence. At this point, music becomes a territory of release for taboo expressions. This is what I read through two lenses: hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) and becoming-imperceptible (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)[6]. Both are strategies of the subaltern to keep desire alive amidst domination.

Starting from this thought, the author assesses that Papuan songs which on the surface sound full of party spirit and joy are in fact a form of lamentation as well as a form of resistance. To understand this more clearly, it is important to distinguish between protest songs and resistance songs. Protest songs appear openly, directly, and confrontationally. Their message is conveyed explicitly, as persuasive songs that openly state objection to power (Denisoff, 1970).[7] In contrast, resistance songs work covertly. Criticism is conveyed subtly through linguistic tactics such as metaphor, euphemism, and anonymity. This pattern is what Scott (1990) calls the hidden transcript, a way for marginalized groups to fight domination without open confrontation, while maintaining dignity, where ideological resistance is embodied in songs, folktales, and theatre that use anonymity.

Furthermore, the author reads today's party and hedonism songs of young Papuans not as a form of apathy, but as resistance in the form of becoming-imperceptible. When frontal resistance is too vulnerable to retaliation, they choose to become unreadable. The state is made awkward: as long as the microphone is on without a single protest lyric that can be banned, the state feels safe and forgets. In fact, behind the euphoria, Papuan-ness as a desire continues to echo, a visibility that is deliberately disguised, but its *memoria passionis* remains alive.

2. Music as a Political Arena

Music is not merely entertainment, but an arena where power is directly negotiated, especially in the context of Indonesia and Papua. It works simultaneously in two opposing directions: as a state tool to construct nationalism and as the most persistent medium of cultural resistance.

In the first direction, the state does not only use a security approach, but also actively produces nationalist-integrative music as a strategy to dampen separatism and promote national integration. In the context of Indonesia, the politics of music in the New Order era shows how

[5] Kusumaryati, V. (2021). #Papuanlivesmatter: Black consciousness and political movements in West Papua. Critical Asian Studies, 53(4), 453–475. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2021.1963794

[6] Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1980)

[7] Denisoff, R. S. (1970). Protest songs: Those on the top forty and those of the streets. *American Quarterly*, *22*(4), 807-823.

the state selected and curated regional musical expressions for the nation-building project, where local cultural expressions were allowed and celebrated as long as they were able to represent national unity (Weintraub, 2010[8]; Wallach, 2008[9]).

However, in the second direction, in Papua, music works in reverse. It functions as a living symbol of collective identity where liberation is practiced daily amidst violence and segregation (Smythe, 2013)[10]. Cultural expression in songs and dances not only resists repression, but also ensures the political continuity and survival of the Papuan people themselves (Webb-Gannon, 2021)[11]. In the contemporary context, those songs work as more than just music, they are a movement. Through social media, decolonization songs are remixed and redistributed as the most persistent form of resistance (Webb-Gannon & Webb, 2019).[12]

This dualism of music's function is most clearly seen in two central figures: Arnold Ap and Black Brothers. At first, Arnold Ap's project through the Mambesak group and the Pelangi Budaya radio broadcast on RRI Jayapura was actually facilitated by the state as a way to construct a folkloric and integrated Papuan-ness (Aditjondro, 2000;[13]Kirksey 2012[14]). By adapting traditional songs from various regions of Papua using tifa and string band, Mambesak succeeded in elevating Papuan culture as something modern, lively, and dignified. But in its development, the opposite happened. The popularity of Mambesak, which sang songs in almost all tribal languages in Papua, has stimulated awareness of a shared identity and Papuan nationalism sentiment (Aditjondro, 2000, pp. 50-51; Kirksey, 2012, pp. 21-45). When music that was expected to be a tool of integration turned into a tool for consolidating Papuan identity, the state then read it as a subversive threat. As a result, Ap was arrested by Kopassus in November 1983 on charges of being a sympathizer of the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) or Free Papua Movement and was executed in April 1984.

The same pattern was also experienced by the Black Brothers. This pop group from Jayapura did not display resistance in a frontal and open way, but worked through coded and symbolic language. Their music, which contained influences from pop-rock to reggae and Black Power aesthetics, was actually a form of hidden transcript voicing pride in black identity amidst the

[8] Weintraub, M. A. Dangdut Stories: A Social and Musical History of Indonesia's Most Popular.
[9] Wallach, J. (2008). *Modern noise, fluid genres: Popular music in Indonesia, 1997–2001*. Univ of Wisconsin Press.
[10] Smythe, J. (2013). The living symbol of song in West Papua: A soul force to be reckoned with. *Indonesia*, *95*(1), 73-91.
[11] Webb-Gannon, C. (2021). Morning star rising: The politics of decolonization in West Papua. University of Hawai'i Press.
[12] Webb-Gannon, C., & Webb, M. (2019). "More than a music, it's a movement": West Papua decolonization songs, social media, and the remixing of resistance. The Contemporary Pacific, 31(2), 309-343. https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2019.0025
[13] Aditjondro, G. J. (2000). Cahaya Bintang Kejora: Papua Barat dalam kajian sejarah, budaya, ekonomi, dan hak asasi manusia. Elsham.
[14] Kirksey, E. (2012). *Freedom in entangled worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press.

dominance of the national narrative (Hayward, 1998[15]; Lockard, 1998[16]). Even songs like *Misteri, Hari Kiamat* and *Lonceng Kematian* which satirized social inequality made them a target of the authorities. However, in the highly securitized political context of Papua, their presence and aesthetics alone were enough to be stigmatized as separatist, so their work was no longer trusted as mere entertainment. That stigma ultimately pushed them to choose voluntary exile to Vanuatu in 1979 as a form of protest against Indonesian policy in Papua (Lockard, 1998; Webb-Gannon, 2021). The decision to go into exile actually strengthened the stigmatization and triggered a more open affiliation with the Free Papua Movement abroad, and gave birth to a repertoire of songs such as *Yamewero* which were then associated with expressions of Papuan nationalism in the diaspora (Ramadhan et al., 2023).[17]

The contestation over this musical arena continues to this day and is proof that the musician's body and his work are objects of political struggle. This can be seen in the Tribute to Black Brothers event on May 4, 2024 sponsored by the Indonesian government, where young Papuan musicians sang Black Brothers songs again with the theme *"Merajut Kebangsaan"* (Weaving Nationality). This event shows a contestation over the body of Black Brothers which was previously identical with the symbol of Papua Merdeka / Free Papua and is now being pulled back into the context of Indonesian-ness.

The same arena of contestation also occurs in the 7th Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival (MACFest), 2023 where there are two conflicting Papuan delegations: the official delegation sponsored by the Indonesian government and the Papuan diaspora delegation abroad representing the United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). The presence of two delegations claiming legitimate representation of Papuan-ness through the same medium of music and art emphasizes that in Papua, music is not a neutral space for entertainment, but a real battlefield where state nationalism and Papuan nationalism are negotiated, rejected, and rewritten through sound.

3. Problem Statement and Research Question: How does becoming-imperceptible work as a strategy of freedom?

This research departs from a paradox in the study of music and politics in Papua that has not been widely answered. Music is positioned by the state as an instrument of national integration through the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) but at the same time it becomes the most persistent arena for identity consolidation and resistance. Previous literature tends to frame Papuan cultural expression within the framework of *memoria passionis* or narratives of suffering and victimization. That frame insufficiently explains how music works as an active and creative survival strategy amidst high securitization.

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[15] Hayward, P. (Ed.). (2016). *Sound alliances: Indigenous peoples, cultural politics, and popular music in the Pacific*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

[16] Lockard, C. (1998). *Dance of life: Popular music and politics in Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii Press.

[17] Ramadhan, R. A., Yahya, G. S. A., & Bintang, L. M. R. P. (2023). Musik dan Papua: Mengkaji Transformasi Konflik Intranegara dari Kearifan Budaya. *Integritas Terbuka: Peace and Interfaith Studies*, *2*(1), 17-26.

The cases of Arnold Ap (Mambesak) and Black Brothers show that even music that is not explicitly oppositional is still read by the state as a subversive threat, leading to repression and exile. This phenomenon continues in the practices of contemporary young Papuan musicians on digital platforms who choose aesthetics of party, love, and spirituality. To understand this phenomenon, this research needs to first clarify what is meant by imperceptibility or becoming-imperceptible. In this article, imperceptibility is not translated as absence, silence, or an attempt to become invisible. On the contrary, it is understood as a strategy of political illegibility, that is, an aesthetic-political practice that is deliberately made unreadable by the logic of state securitization. The state is only able to capture frontal and explicit resistance that contains keywords such as *Merdeka* (freedom), *Bintang Kejora*, *Papua, and Melanesia*.

By choosing forms that appear apolitical such as songs about the sea, birds, love, and parties, Papuan music escapes the censorship radar, shifting from a mouth that is forbidden to speak to a body that is allowed to dance. It is not a form of defeat, but a way to continue to exist. Therefore, a research question is needed that does not only ask what the content of resistance is, but how that resistance is coded, disguised, and maintained across generations from cassettes to streaming.

Main Question:

How does Papuan music, from the era of Black Brothers in the late 1970s to contemporary musicians on digital platforms, articulate strategies of resistance and freedom through the politics of imperceptibility (becoming-imperceptible)?

Sub-questions:

1. At the textual and aesthetic level: How are the strategies of hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) and becoming-imperceptible (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) manifested linguistically and musically in the lyrics of Papuan songs?
    - How do natural metaphors, animal figures, euphemisms, and spiritual imagery (for example in the works of Arnold Ap *Arbanya Ifo Amsam* and Sam Kapisa *Manyei Sima*) work as cultural codes for the ingroup?
    - How does the choice of genre (folk string band, pop-rock, reggae, Black Power aesthetics) function as a political marker of identity?
2. At the historical-political context level: How do conditions of securitization and stigmatization *OPM, separatis, makar, teroris* (Free Papua Movement, separatist, treason, terrorist) shape the aesthetic choices of Papuan musicians to avoid frontal protest songs and choose covert resistance songs?
    - How does the strategy of imperceptibility (becoming-imperceptible) differ between the analogue era (cassettes, RRI radio) and the digital era (YouTube, Spotify, social media) in avoiding state censorship and repression?
3. At the level of political practice: In what ways does imperceptibility (becoming-imperceptible) operate not as silence or defeat, but as an active political practice to maintain dignity, collective memory, and the desire for autonomy outside the colonial-nationalist binary?
    - How does the music arena as a field of contestation (for example Tribute to Black Brothers 2024 and MACFest 2023) reclaim and renegotiate the bodies and works of Papuan musicians?

This formulation allows analysis to be carried out through close reading of lyrics, historical-cultural analysis, and reading of the political economy of music circulation, to show that freedom in Papua is not only claimed through visibility, but also performed through a sonic strategy of becoming unreadable.

4. Roadmap of the Argument

This article proposes a central argument that in the context of prolonged political repression and securitization in Papua, becoming-imperceptible is not a manifestation of apathy or depoliticization of music. On the contrary, it is the most sophisticated and sustainable resistance strategy developed by Papuan musicians across generations. Unlike protest songs that work frontally and are easily read by the state apparatus as an act of makar, Papuan music in its contemporary manifestation instead chooses to disguise itself as party music, euphoria, and hedonism that textually contains no subversive content. It is in this logic that the politics of imperceptibility reaches its most perfect form. The state is put in an awkward position and feels secure because it does not find keywords that can be banned such as *merdeka or referendum*, while for the Papuan ingroup, the music succeeds in keeping the desire for a free, dignified, and whole Papuan-ness reverberating. Freedom here is not declared through a manifesto, but is experienced collectively as pleasure felt in the body, in dance, and in singing together, even if only temporarily, amidst the shadow of *memoria passionis* that continues to haunt.

To prove this argument, this article moves in two interrelated analytical steps. First, this article builds a theoretical framework by marrying two conceptual pillars: James C. Scott's (1990) hidden transcript theory on the resistance strategies of subaltern groups under domination, and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming-imperceptible as an aesthetic tactic to escape capture by power by becoming unreadable. This marriage is important to read Papuan music not as a transparent text, but as a complex coding practice. This framework allows us to see how the desire for freedom is not spoken directly, but is experienced affectively on the dance floor.

Second, this article applies that framework through a historical-musical reading that stretches from the analogue to the digital era. First, through the works of Arnold Ap (Mambesak) and Black Brothers in the era of 1970 to 1980s, this article shows how metaphors of nature, birds, and the sea were used as hidden transcript to escape censorship, but were still fragile and thus ended in stigmatization, exile, and execution. This historical foundation then becomes a contrast to understand the novelty of strategy in contemporary Papuan music circulating on digital platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok. By analysing the repertoire of Papuan hip-hop, dancehall, and party songs that go viral with seemingly hedonistic lyrics, this article shows how *pesta* (party) functions as the most effective political camouflage. This is where the complete becoming-imperceptible occurs: when the state has no juridical reason to ban, music instead succeeds in creating an autonomous space where Papuan-ness is celebrated without permission. This article will close by emphasizing that imperceptibility works with the logic of letting the body dance when the mouth is forbidden to speak.

Theoretical Framework

To read Papuan music as a political practice, this article marries two conceptual pillars that were born from different traditions but share the same concern: how dominated groups survive and act when direct speech is foreclosed. If James C. Scott explains how resistance is coded, then Deleuze and Guattari explain why the most effective code today is one that is not even legible as resistance.

1. Hidden Transcript - The Art of Survival Under Domination

James C. Scott (1990) distinguishes between public transcript and hidden transcript. Public transcript is the open interaction between the dominant and the dominated, that is, a performance of compliance, loyalty, and legibility demanded by power. Scott defines it as "a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (Scott, 1990, p. 2). In the context of Papua, public transcript is the language of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, pembangunan, and nasionalisme* that musicians are obliged to perform on state-sponsored stages, such as at the Tribute to Black Brothers themed *"Merajut Kebangsaan"*. This shows what Scott calls "the capacity of dominant groups to prevail in defining and constituting what counts as the public transcript" (Scott, 1990, p. 14). Conversely, hidden transcript is a discourse that occurs offstage, in safe and autonomous spaces where subaltern groups can speak honestly among themselves. According to Scott, "every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a hidden transcript that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (Scott, 1990, p. xii). It is not merely a collection of complaints, but a culture of *infrapolitics*, that is, forms of everyday resistance that are low-profile and avoid direct confrontation.

My argument is that the gnomic tradition of Papua or the practice of elders advising through poetic, figurative, and symbolic language, is an original form of hidden transcript that existed long before the Indonesian state. In Biak oral culture, for example, frontal critique is considered coarse and dangerous. Wisdom must be wrapped. Stories about birds hunted by hunters, about restless seas, or mountains that weep, are never just about nature. They are moral and political lessons that can only be fully decoded by an ingroup that shares the same ecological and affective archive. Therefore, when Arnold Ap sings *Arbanya Ifo Amsam* or Sam Kapisa sings *Manyei Sima*, they are not merely creating aesthetic beauty. They are activating a cultural technology for survival that has long existed. Sea and birds are not ornamental metaphors, but political codes.

To operationalize Scott's theory in lyrical analysis, the writer identifies three linguistic devices that constitute the grammar of the Papuan hidden transcript. These three devices are an adaptation of what Scott describes as "the ideological resistance of subordinate groups... their use of anonymity and ambiguity" (Scott, 1990, frontmatter). Scott explains that these disguised forms of resistance work through practices such as euphemism and ambiguity to avoid sanctions, where "ambiguity and euphemism provide a kind of insurance" for subordinate groups (Scott, 1990, p. 152-153). Based on that framework, I operationalize three linguistic devices, namely

anonymity and subject displacement, ecological figures as euphemism, and pronominal ambiguity.

First, natural and faunal metaphors. Scott notes that subaltern groups often use the natural world to talk about power because it provides plausible deniability or a reasonable pretext. In Papua, where life is tightly bound to forest, sea, and birds, this device is very powerful. Eagle being hunted, *cenderawasih* (bird of paradise) trapped, or waves that are restless are substitutes for the Papuan body under surveillance. For outside listeners, including state censors, it is a song about the environment. For Papuan listeners, it is immediately read affectively and cognitively: this is about being hunted, about losing land, about longing to fly.

Second, euphemism and allusion. This is the practice of replacing dangerous words with safe ones. Words like *Bintang Kejora*, *merdeka, referendum, or OPM* are keywords that trigger securitization. In hidden transcript, they are replaced with seemingly neutral and safe terms such as *rumah, pulang, tanah air, or Tuhan*. Love songs become political precisely because love is never just romantic love, but love for land and people that cannot be named directly. This way allows songs to circulate on cassette, RRI Jayapura in the 1970s era as well as on digital platforms today without being banned.

Third, anonymity and subject displacement. Scott emphasizes that the hidden transcript often conceals who the speaker is. The singer does not say *saya*, *orang Papua*, *menderita* (I, as a Papuan, am suffering). He says *burung itu sedih* (that bird is sad), *aku rindu* (I am longing), *hari ini kau menghilang* (today you disappeared), or uses kita (we) and kau (you) ambiguously. Arnold Ap's lyric *Andai saja aku burung Elang* (If only I were an eagle) becomes powerful because aku (I) immediately becomes *burung* (bird). Black Brothers sing *Hey kau yang munafik, kapan akhir sandiwaramu?* (Hey you hypocrite, when will your charade end?). The subject is displaced from a citizen who can be charged with *makar* (treason/sedition) to a non-human creature that cannot be prosecuted. It is this anonymity that made Black Brothers cassettes dangerous yet difficult to prosecute juridically. The state knows this is subversive, but cannot find legal evidence in its lyrics.

Hidden transcript allows us to read continuity from *Mambesak* to contemporary music, the code remains. However, Scott's framework has limits. It still assumes there is a hidden truth behind the mask that ultimately wants to be revealed. What if the strongest strategy is not hiding the truth, but becoming unreadable as something political at all? This phenomenon is seen not only in hip hop but also in *Wisisi* music, that is, EDM originating from the Papuan highlands that is often read as party music without political meaning.

2. Becoming-Imperceptible - From the Forbidden Mouth to the Dancing Body

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose becoming-imperceptible not as becoming invisible, but as becoming ungraspable by the apparatus of power. Becoming-imperceptible is the refusal of the very categories through which power identifies, enumerates, and controls its subjects. As they assert at the beginning of A Thousand Plateaus, the project is "to make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and

think" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). If the state captures resistance by searching for its easily recognizable signs - such as a raised fist, protest lyrics, or a flag - then becoming-imperceptible is a line of flight that escapes precisely by no longer looking like resistance. In their most famous formulation, this process means "to become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line... To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself gray on gray" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 232).

In the context of Papuan music, this strategy explains why aesthetics that appear apolitical - songs about the sea, birds, love, and parties - are in fact the most effective form of endurance. The music shifts from the forbidden mouth to the dancing body. The writer translates this as political illegibility. Becoming-imperceptible in this article does not mean absence, muteness, or defeat. It is an active aesthetic-political practice of deliberately making oneself illegible to the state's securitization logic. The Indonesian state in Papua, as I have shown, operates through a keyword-based security logic: it can only capture what is explicitly named as *makar* (treason/sedition). It is highly prepared to censor a song that says *"Papua Merdeka."* It is utterly powerless before a song that says *"kita goyang sampai pagi"* (we dance until morning) with a dancehall beat, even if the dancing body is celebrating a Papuan-ness that the state seeks to erase.

This is where Deleuze and Guattari go beyond Scott. The subaltern in Scott's version still whispers the truth backstage. The subaltern in Deleuze and Guattari's version dances on the main stage, but in a way that the state does not recognize as a threat. The difference is between hiding and camouflage. Hiding says: "I have a secret message, do not find it." Camouflage says: "There is nothing here, this is just a party."

Therefore, partying, hedonism, and euphoria in contemporary Papuan music - genres such as Papuan hip-hop, dancehall, and party songs that go viral on TikTok - must be read not as depoliticization, but as the perfection of imperceptibility. When frontal resistance is too vulnerable to retaliation, as proven by the execution of Arnold Ap and the forced exile of the Black Brothers, musicians choose to shift the terrain of struggle from the forbidden mouth to the dancing body. The state has no juridical and moral basis to ban joy, to ban love songs, or to ban parties. Feeling secure because there are no protest lyrics to ban, the state is instead rendered awkward and off-guard, while an autonomous space is created where Papuan identity is experienced and nurtured.

It is in this space that freedom is not claimed through a manifesto or a demand for visibility that would immediately trigger repression. Freedom is experienced as affect embodied: the collective pleasure of singing together in Papuan Malay, the swaying of hips, the pride of Black skin celebrated in a Black Power aesthetic re-articulated through reggae. This is what I call sonic freedom: a temporary yet real experience of autonomy that exists outside the colonial-nationalist binary that demands Papuans choose between being Indonesian or separatist.

Thus, becoming-imperceptible is not apathy. It is the most cunning and sustainable form of resistance. It argues that under conditions of prolonged surveillance and control such as in Papua, the primary political act may not be to make oneself more visible, but to make oneself politically illegible, so that the body can continue to dance when the mouth is forbidden to speak.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach combining textual close reading and historical-cultural analysis. The aim of this method is not to measure the popularity of Papuan music, but to unpack how political meaning is encoded, disguised, and sustained across generations under conditions of securitization.

1. Corpus and Song Selection

The research corpus is divided into two historical periods that represent the shift in music circulation technology from analogue to digital. This division is intended to trace the continuity and transformation of resistance strategies, from explicit forms of hidden transcript toward fluid forms of becoming-imperceptible in the digital platform era.

a. Period 1: The Analogue Era (1976–1984)

This period focuses on the works of Arnold Ap with the group Mambesak and the Black Brothers. These two actors are selected as they represent the two main poles of Papuan cultural resistance during the New Order that experienced direct state repression. Songs were selected purposively based on three criteria. First, having a history of repression, banning, or stigmatization by the state. Second, employing natural and faunal metaphors, local languages, or allegory to evade censorship. Third, being recirculated by young musicians today as collective memory. From this period, 7 songs are analysed:

1. Mambesak: *Arbanya Ifo Amsam, Misteri Kehidupan*, and *Manyei Sima* as popularized by Sam Kapisa.
2. Black Brothers: *Hilang, Lonceng Kematian*, *Hari Kiamat*, and *Samandoye* as songs that in various references contain socio-political critique.

Lyrics for this period were obtained through source triangulation consisting of cassette archives, digital searches, and secondary interviews previously published by other researchers.

b. Period 2: The Digital Era (2010–2025)

This period focuses on contemporary Papuan musicians whose circulation is dominant on YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok platforms. This period is crucial to test the hypothesis that seemingly apolitical aesthetics are in fact the most advanced form of becoming-imperceptible strategy. The selection criteria for this period are as follows. First, high virality and engagement among Papuan youth marked by view counts, TikTok usage, and circulation within local communities. Second, being textually seemingly apolitical, hedonistic, or themed around love and partying, thus superficially escaping the state's securitization radar. Third, being produced by musicians who explicitly identify as Indigenous Papuans.

From this period, 7 songs and 1 instrumental genre are analysed, representing three dominant aesthetic spectrums:

1. Papuan hip-hop with street and romantic lyrics: Shine of Black - *Jang Ganggu*, Fresh Boy ft. Blasta Rap Family - *Ko Tinggal Oles Turun Naik Trus*.
2. Dancehall and Afro-fusion party: Pace Gembul, Walo and Nalello - *Komologwe Melanesia*, One Scoot - *Karamap,* and the collaboration Dave Solution feat. Ras Muhamad, Noizekilla and Yedijah - *Reggae Music.*
3. Love-island pop reggae and customary electronics: Mace Purba, D'Ari - *Baju Hitam* and Epo d Fenomeno ft Omcon SB, D'Ari - *Tabawa deng Waktu*, as well as *Wisisi* music by Asep Nayak that combines hypnotic EDM rhythms for the Aster dance of the Papuan Highlands.

For the digital period, this article does not perform anonymization. All songs are works that have been openly published and gone viral on public platforms. The explicit mention of musician names and song titles is conducted as a form of recognition of the cultural labour of Papuan musicians as creative subjects.

2. Analytical Techniques

Analysis is conducted in three interrelated layers to unpack how resistance moves from coded text toward uncapturable sound.

a. First Layer: Close Reading of Lyrics as Code

Lyrics are read not as transparent text, but as a code containing hidden transcripts. For this purpose, this study operationalizes three analytical tools derived from Scott (1990):

i. Identification of natural and faunal metaphors.

Tracing the use of birds, sea, forest, and land as political allegory.

ii. Tracking euphemisms.

Tracking the use of euphemistic language, where potentially sensitive political concepts are displaced through softened, everyday terms that serve as safe substitutes.

iii. Subject displacement and pronoun ambiguity.

Tracing shifts from the human I to a bird, as well as the use of an ambiguous we to create ingroup solidarity without naming a risky identity. Each lyric is transcribed in its original language, whether Biak, Papuan Malay, or Indonesian, and then translated in layers to capture both literal and figurative meanings.

b. Second Layer: Musical and Aesthetic Analysis as Body Technology

Politics is not only in words, but also in sound. This layer analyzes choices of genre, tempo, and instrumentation as part of the becoming-imperceptible strategy. In the analogue era, analysis focuses on how *Mambesak* used *tifa* and string band to build a dignified and rooted Papuan modernity, and how Black Brothers used reggae and Black Power aesthetics to mark Black pride and Melanesian connection.

In the contemporary era, analysis focuses on how musical elements function as technologies to move the body and create autonomous space. For example, 95 to 100 BPM beats, dancehall basslines, and collective chants that shift politics from the surveilled mouth to the body dancing on the dance floor, as well as the Aster dance of Wamena with the hypnotic beats of Wisisi music at 130-150 BPM. At this point, music no longer needs to be understood as resistance to work as resistance.

c. Third Layer: Historical-Cultural Analysis and Political Economy of Circulation

Songs never circulate in a vacuum. This layer situates each song within its context of securitization and circulation. For the analogue era, the contexts analysed are the labelling policies of OPM, separatist, and *makar* (treason) (Chauvel, 2005; Kusumaryati, 2021), the case of the execution of Arnold Ap and the exile of Black Brothers to Vanuatu, and nation-building practices through festivals.

For the digital era, the contexts analyzed are state curatorial practices through festivals such as Tribute to Black Brothers 2024 and MACFest 7th 2023, as well as the logic of platform algorithms. The main argument at this layer is that YouTube and TikTok algorithms actually assist the imperceptibility strategy. Because songs do not contain sensitive keywords or visual content flagged by moderation systems, such as symbols like the Morning Star flag or explicit slogans and texts like Papua Merdeka or Freedom, they evade flagging and are instead pushed to a wider audience. Illegibility becomes a circulation advantage.

3. Research Validation and Ethics

Validation is conducted by comparing the results of the lyrical close reading with secondary literature, news archives, and the author's personal interview archives previously conducted for publication in online media. These archives include conversations with Amri Kahar and Abdullah Yunus of Black Brothers regarding the production context of the analogue era and the meaning of the euphemism *Papaso*, as well as with Epo D'Fenomeno and Asep Nayak regarding independent production practices at Rum Fararur and creative spaces around Wamena. For the digital period, validation is complemented by reception analysis of listener comments on YouTube and social media as an indicator of the difference between ingroup and outgroup readings. Ingroup comments that understand the allusions serve as a marker that the hidden transcript is working.

In line with the principle of do no harm amid a still vulnerable political context, this research does not conduct new interviews with active musicians for the purposes of this article. All reused primary data has been previously published in online media in a journalistic context, and other data is sourced from public archives and open digital platforms, thereby avoiding the creation of new securitization risks for the musicians.

Discussion (analogue vs digital): From a Fragile Shield to a Complete Camouflage

This section shows how the politics of imperceptibility works in two different technological regimes. If the analogue era used metaphor as a shield to survive, albeit a fragile one that the state could still penetrate, the digital era uses festivity as a camouflage that leaves the state with no reason to shoot.

1. Analogue Era (1976-1984): Hidden Transcript as Figurative Resistance

The periodization of the analogue era refers to two milestones of Papuan popular music that became the foundation of the cultural movement: Black Brothers (1976) and Mambesak (1979).

Chronologically, Black Brothers emerged first as the only Papuan band group to achieve national scale popularity under the Irama Tara label. The argument in this paper is that the presence of Mambesak under the leadership of Arnold Ap and Sam Kapisa at the Museum of Anthropology of Cenderawasih University was a cultural response to that modernization. While Black Brothers popularized pop, rock, *kroncong*, disco, jazz and reggae with electric band instruments, Mambesak consciously maintained traditional identity through string band instrumentation: acoustic guitar, ukulele, standing bass and *tifa*. In an interview on RRI, Arnold Ap even criticized the pop rock version of the song *Apuse* by Black Brothers for erasing elements of Papuan folk singing.[18]

To understand the resistance strategy in this era, this paper uses James C. Scott's hidden transcript framework (1990). Scott distinguishes between public transcript as compliance in front of power, and hidden transcript as concealed critique. In the analogue era, the hidden transcript in Papua worked through three main devices: nature metaphor, anonymity, and euphemism.

a. Black Brothers Corpus

Under Irama Tara, Black Brothers produced 8 albums with 66 songs. From a catalogue search, three dominant themes emerge: social criticism, identity pride, and romance (Awom, 2017). Yet the most dominant theme is romance, almost 90% of the corpus is sentimental pop about love, loss, and longing. This dominance is not accidental, but strategic. Songs like *Hilang* appear apolitical textually: *hari ini kau pergi sayang, hari ini kau menghilang, tiada senyum tiada pesan padaku yang kautinggalkan* (today you're gone baby, today you disappeared, no smile no message left for me). The song dwells on seemingly endless sadness: *kini ku sendiri lagi, melangkah dalam kesedihan, tiada penghibur hati, tertelan dalam kesepian* (now I am alone again, stepping in sadness, no consolation, swallowed into loneliness). It is notable that the one lamenting here is a man. This contrasts with the patriarchal gender discourse dominant in Indonesian culture, and marks loss as something human and genderless, a theme that recurs across almost 90 percent of Black Brothers' 66 songs (Awom, 2017).

Because the loss is framed in such universal, sentimental terms, its political charge remains hidden. The sadness here may refer to something deeper than the loss of a lover, pointing toward a Papuan experience of loss that is more profound and collective. Yet in the context of New Order power relations, the very presence of Black Brothers in the national public space was itself a strategy to break through hegemony. The primitive and backward stereotype attached to Papuan culture (Chauvel, 2005) was countered not by direct argument, but by demonstrating musical virtuosity. Contemporary reception on YouTube confirms the success of this public transcript: viewers do not discuss politics, but rather express admiration for the wild guitar licks and rapid drum ruffles played in analogue without the aid of digital technology. It is precisely this recognition of skill that became the entry point to dismantle stigma.

For social criticism, Black Brothers used the technique of anonymous receiver, blurring the

[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5nK3Fclvvg&t=2s (accessed on October 2nd, 2026)

target of criticism with pronouns "you, he, they" to avoid retaliation. This is seen in *Hari Kiamat: Sadarlah kau cara hidupmu* (Be aware of your way of life), *Lonceng Kematian*: *Hey kau yang munafik* (Hey you hypocrite), and *Kaum Benalu: Dia senyum di musim panen* (He smiles in harvest season). Hari Kiamat reads: *Di tepi jalan si miskin menjerit, bintang jatuh hari kiamat* (all along the street the poor scream, falling star doomsday). The phrase *bintang jatuh* (falling star) has two layers of meaning. Literally a star is something high, a symbol of glory. In the militaristic context of the 1970s New Order, star also refers to the star ranked generals in power. Thus, falling star is a prophecy of the fall of power, a way to name the General whose name was taboo to mention directly.

Lonceng Kematian is its sequel. In the recording, bells are heard ringing repeatedly and wailing before the lyrics enter. In Papuan Christian tradition, bells are a sign of mourning for a deceased congregation member. Thus, *Lonceng Kematian* signifies the death of humanity.

Huembello is a different case. This song in *Moi / Klabra* language from Sorong, its main power lies not in lyrical meaning, but in the magical effect of repetition and howling like a dog: *"Huembello O... watu watu kuru ye".* According to the singer, Abdullah Yunus, a dog's howl is a bad omen that *suanggi*[19] is roaming. In contemporary usage, *suanggi* also means police or soldiers in plain clothes and informants. Thus, *Huembello* is a hysterical song about the panic over military sweeping operations in the 1960s to 1980s that caused thousands of refugees to flee to PNG. It was because of this situation that several members of Black Brothers chose exile in 1979.

Samandoye shows the device of euphemism. The word Papua which in the New Order era was considered taboo due to its political connotation, was plastered over as *"Papaso"*: *"samandoye samandoye etora Papaso"*. According to an interview with Amri Kahar, Black Brothers' saxophonist, this is a form of boasting: "look, this is us Papuan people". *Papaso* is also an acronym for Papua Pacific, which affirms Melanesian affiliation to the Pacific rather than to Indonesia.

b. Mambesak Corpus

The Mambesak is recorded as having produced five albums of Papuan folk songs from various tribes, although the pocket book lists four albums and some versions mention seven. The official Mambesak albums were translated into Indonesian as part of the curatorial agenda of the Anthropology Department at UNCEN. These official translations focus only on nature, humans and fauna, with no theme of resistance, thus appearing to have been adjusted to the agenda of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Therefore, the three songs analysed here are deliberately taken from outside the official albums, in the Biak language, the place of origin of Arnold Ap and Sam Kapisa.

Manyei Sima by Sam Kapisa: *Osofa ipyum imnis manbesaki iwa* (no bird is as beautiful as the bird of paradise), *bapeda mano man nye sima* (but what happened to those birds?). This song is

[19] Suanggi refers to a widely feared form of sorcery and witchcraft in Papuan cosmology, often associated with invisible aggression and unexplained death.

not merely a catalogue of fauna. The birds are mentioned with their characters: *Mambesak* (bird of paradise) that is beautiful, *Mansapur* (eagle) that is mighty, *Manyouri* (parrot) that is skilled at singing. These birds are metaphors for people who dare to sing about justice. The song does not mention who they are, kept anonymous intentionally for safety. Its message is tragic: those who fight for rights will be hunted like birds.

Arbanya Ifo Amsam by Arnold Ap: *Suni, sundane sundandema* (the tide is at full high), *Arbanya ifo amsam* (the reef is full of sea urchins), *Mansorom irow ikarandin* (Heron flies but finds it hard to land)". Sea urchins in large numbers are pests that destroy coral reefs, metaphorically representing the threat of large-scale migration and military operations. *Mansorom* who has difficulty landing is a metaphor for the singer himself.

Misteri Kehidupan: *Hidup ini suatu misteri, yang kudamba hanya kebebasan, Andai saja aku burung elang, jadi buruan akhirnya terbunuh* (Life itself is a mystery, all I long for is freedom, If only I were an eagle, hunted in the end, and slain). This Indonesian language song was created while Arnold was in detention at Polda Irian Jaya, so it literally tells his own story and becomes a prophecy of his fate, executed in April 1984.

Mambesak recordings were done manually and simply with a tape recorder in the courtyard of the UNCEN museum, duplicated and sold door to door or entrusted to churches. Popularity was actually gained through RRI Jayapura broadcasts, the programs *Pelangi Budaya* and *Pancaran Kasih* hosted by Arnold in Papuan Malay interspersed with mop, Papuan humour.

Table 1. Analog Era Corpus Matrix

No	Song Title	Key Lyrics + Figurative Meaning	Hidden Transcript Device	Musical Features
1	*Manyei Sima* - Sam Kapisa	"bapeda mano man nye sima" / Where have all the birds gone? The birds are the hunted fighters for justice.	Nature Metaphor, Perpetrator Anonymity	Acoustic string band, Biak folk
2	*Arbanya Ifo Amsam* - Arnold Ap	"Arbanya ifo amsam" / reef full of sea urchins = land full of threats	Nature Metaphor, Euphemism	Mellow minor, tifa drum, acoustic guitar
3	*Misteri Kehidupan* - Arnold Ap	"yang kudamba hanya kebebasan"(All I long for is freedom) / hunted eagle = prisoner prophecy)	Euphemism, Nature Metaphor	Pop Ballad, Languishing Vocals, Composed in Police Detention
4	*Hilang* - Black Brothers	"hari ini kau menghilang" (today you're gone) / Losing a lover = collective mourning	Anonymous *"Kau"* (You) Receiver, Euphemism	Sentimental Slow Pop, Analog Virtuosity
5	*Hari Kiamat* – Black Brothers	"bintang jatuh hari kiamat" (the star is falling down) / falling star = bearing ruler	Nature Metaphor, Anonymous Receiver	Slow Pop Rock

6	*Lonceng Kematian* – Black Brothers	"Hey kau yang munafik" (hey you hypocrite) + The bell sound = the death of humanity	Ritual Metaphor, Anonymous Receiver	Pop Rock, Bell Effects and Lamentation
7	*Huembello & Samandoye*- Black Brothers	"Huembello O" = the howling of suanggi / police, *"Papaso"* = euphemism for Papua	Anonymity, the magical effect of mantra repetition	Wild Funk Rock, Hysterical Vocals

c. The Limitations of Strategy in the Analogue Era: When Text Passes, the Body Does Not

Table 1 shows that the analogue-era hidden transcript worked through two layers of strategy. The first layer is James Scott's strategy, making the text unseen. Mambesak (No. 1-3) used Biak nature metaphors to disguise the subject of resistance as an ethnographic catalogue. Black Brothers (No. 4-7) used the anonymous receiver *"Kau"* (you) and the euphemism *"Papaso"* and wrapped collective grief in a sentimental pop format to be accepted by the national market. In this layer, what is made unseen is its political meaning, while the singer's body remains visible and present on stage.

The second layer is the failed attempt to make the body unseen, or becoming imperceptible. In the analogue era, sound could circulate via cassette without presenting the body, but its production remained tied to a body and a place that could be monitored. To duplicate Mambesak cassettes, a body had to be present pressing recorders at the UNCEN museum. To sell them, a body had to be present at markets, churches, and RRI studios, all of which have addresses. The New Order state did not censor the text, but censored the infrastructure of its encounter. There was no need to prove the word *"merdeka"* or freedom in the lyrics, it was enough to capture and execute Arnold Ap's body in April 1984.

Black Brothers' exile to PNG in 1979 was an early form of becoming imperceptible geographically. Once the body was safe beyond the reach of the state, the hidden transcript function was no longer needed. The metaphorical shield was lifted and explicit songs like *Yamewero* were born with the declaration *Yamewero oo Yamewero Yabe Women Kakero* meaning I don't want to be a slave (Ramadhan et al., 2023).[20] This shows the limit of the analogue era: as long as music production still required a body settled in one place, Scott's strategy of disguising the text would never be enough to protect the body. It is this limit that was later overcome in the digital era, when not only the voice could circulate without a body, but production itself could be done without a body.

2. The Digital Era (2010-2025): The Party as the Perfect Camouflage

If in the analogue era the hidden transcript worked as a fragile metaphorical shield, in the digital era it evolves into perfect camouflage. If the analogue is the metaphorical shield, the digital is the party as camouflage. The logic of resistance changes completely. If the analogue era was about hiding to not be seen, the digital era is about appearing so brightly that it is not read

[20] Ramadhan, R. A., Yahya, G. S. A., & Bintang, L. M. R. P. (2023). Musik dan Papua: Mengkaji Transformasi Konflik Intranegara dari Kearifan Budaya. *Integritas Terbuka: Peace and Interfaith Studies*, *2*(1), 17-26.

as resistance. This is the perfection of becoming imperceptible: political illegibility.

This condition emerges from two new realities faced by young Papuan musicians; first, the trauma of analogue infrastructure. The collective memory of Arnold Ap's execution and the exile of the Black Brothers teaches that frontal resistance requiring a physical body in a physical space is deadly. A visible body is a body that can be captured.

Second, the logic of the algorithm. Platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok do not censor ideology, they censor keywords. Moderation works based on a list of forbidden words: *merdeka, referendum, OPM*. If those words are absent, a song is considered 100% safe, apolitical, and worthy of being pushed to the For You Page (FYP). From the intersection of these two conditions, a new strategy emerges, known locally as *Lagu Acara / Lagu Acak* (Party Song).

Lagu Acara is a total inversion of Mambesak. If the function of music was once to have its disguised lyrics listened to, its function now is to accommodate the partying body. When a song is categorized as *lagu acara* or party Song, its political content becomes irrelevant because the body takes over the meaning.

This is what makes this camouflage perfect. Textually, viral songs of the digital era such as Papuan hip hop with 90 to 95 BPM beats, Papuan dancehall, pop reggae and wisisi contain almost no words that can be charged as treason. *Wisisi* is purely instrumental and hypnotic, designed for mass *wisisi* dance or *Aster Wamena* communal dance, with a tempo that can reach up to 160 BPM. There is no Merdeka or freedom. There are only party vocabularies that pass moderation: *kitong goyang sampai pagi, nona manis, tanah air, pulang, party, love, or in the case of wisisi, no words at all, only a beat that carries the body.* However, dancing together itself is a claim of collective presence of the Papuans. For the state system and the algorithm, this is party music. But for the Papuan ingroup, its effect is multiplied precisely because of that party classification.

This is what the analogue era failed to achieve. In the analogue era, sound could circulate without a body, but its production still required a body. In the digital era, not only is distribution bodiless, for example a wav file via Telegram or an anonymous account, but production itself is bodiless, for example a bedroom studio using FL Studio. The party is a shield that does not need to be defended, because no one considers it a shield.

Table 2. Digital Era Corpus Matrix (2010-2025): From Hidden Transcript to Hyper Visible Transcript

No	Song Title	Key lyrics + Camouflage Devices	Evolution: Hidden → Hyper-Visible	Platform & Sonic Strategy
1	Fresh Boy feat Blasta - *Turun Naik Oles Trus*	"ko tinggal oles turun naik trus" / Party Camouflage: dance/jurus	Political text becomes party text - hyper-visible transcript	Youtube, TikTok dance challenge
2	One Scoot - *Karamap*	"Jang tes we salah, ini karamap bos" ("Don't test us wrong, this	Aggressive lyrics become party anthem	YouTube, *ragga* Punjab

		is Karamap boss")- War chant becomes party chant		
3	Pace Gembul, Walo & Nalello - *Komologwe Melanesia*	"Komologwe Melanesia" / Romantic Camouflage: Melanesia wrapped in cheesy romance	Algorithmic Safe Space: political term → coastal praise for FYP	YouTube, TikTok FYP, Afrobeat
4	Mace Purba & D'Ari - *Baju Hitam*	"Baju hitam tanda setia" / Romantic Camouflage: loyalty as love song	Resistance as love song	Youtube, pop reggae
5	Dave Solution ft. Ras Muhamad, Noizekilla, Yedijah - *Reggae Music*	"Kingston Jamaica to West Papua" / Pan-Melanesian Camouflage	Algorithmic Safe Space: Direct political alliance made legible globally	YouTube, Reggaeville, Papua-Bali-Java collab
6	Epo D'Fenomeno ft Omcon SB, D'Ari - Tabawa deng Waktu	"tabawa deng waktu / ombak teluk..." / Romantic Camouflage: Home producer	Intimacy as camouflage for longing/home	YouTube, hip hop reggae
7	Asep Nayak - Wisisi	No lyrics, 140-160 BPM / Non-textual Camouflage: Bodiless production	Perfect: No text to censor - Sound as resistance	Highland EDM, Aster Wamena massal

a. Point 1: From Hidden Transcript to Hyper-Visible Transcript (Reversing Scott)

In the analogue era, to survive censorship, critique had to be rendered invisible, folded into the metaphor of a bird, a mountain, or the wind, a classic hidden transcript. In the digital era, the logic is inverted. To survive algorithmic and state censorship, critique must be rendered hyper-visible, but in a form that is illegible to the censor as political, as party, as dance challenge, as collective joy. If James Scott's resistance had to be hidden, Papuan pop's resistance has to be danced. It is no longer hidden, but hyper-visible.

At the level of body and sound, this is the most tangible line of flight. The New Order state captured resistance through the mouth, through what was spoken. Party music moves resistance from the mouth to the body. The state has no article to prohibit the wining of hips, to prohibit collective happiness, to prohibit young Papuans from feeling proud to be Black on TikTok. When the mouth is forbidden to speak, the body is allowed to dance. In that dance, freedom is not experienced as a declaration that can be criminalized, but as an affect. It is felt as a vibration in the body, as pride, as collective joy that circulates without ever needing to be spoken.

b. Point 2: From Production Bound to the Body of the State to Production with a Body that Cannot be Captured

The limitation of resistance strategies in the analogue era as described in sub-chapter 4.1 lies in the material dependence of cultural production on state infrastructure. In order to be produced and circulated, the works of Mambesak during that period had to borrow the body of the state: the Anthropological Museum of Cenderawasih University as a recording space, Radio Republik Indonesia Jayapura as a broadcast distribution channel, and the Irama Tara record label

in Jakarta as a reproduction mechanism. Within James Scott's analytical framework, such infrastructure is legible, meaning it has a physical and administrative address recorded in the state archive, making it easy to monitor, control, and shut down. State repression in that period worked not by censoring song texts alone, but by disciplining the bodies and spaces that produced them.

Data in Table 2 No. 1-7 shows a total reversal of that dependency logic. All songs in this digital corpus were produced independently outside state infrastructure, in home studios and self-owned production houses, including No. 6 *Tabawa deng Waktu* produced by Epo D'Fenomeno, Omcon SB, and D'Ari at Rum Fararur. The same pattern applies to No. 7 Wisisi by Asep Nayak, which was produced independently with its main base in a bedroom, but recording was sometimes done in the surroundings of Wamena with portable devices and uploaded independently to YouTube without going through a label intermediary.

This marks a fundamental transition in the political economy of Papuan music production, from a legible body to an imperceptible body as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari. Imperceptibility here is not understood as absence, but as a practice of decentralizing the production infrastructure itself. If in the analogue era the state only needed to close one institutional node to stop circulation, then in the digital era the state is faced with a production network spread across independent points that are unmapped in the formal music industry map. Consequently, classic repression mechanisms such as confiscating cassettes or closing studios lose their effectiveness, because the production base has transformed into entities that are administratively uncapturable.

c. Point 3: From Geographic Safe Space to Algorithmic Safe Space (Yamewero's New Place)

If Point 2 discusses where songs are produced, then Point 3 discusses where songs take shelter in order to continue to be heard. In the analogue era, safe space was geographic. Black Brothers had to go into physical exile to PNG, Vanuatu, Australia and Netherland in order to sing *Yamewero* explicitly with the lyric *Yamewero oo Yamewero Yabe Women Kakero* (I do not want to be a slave). Those foreign countries functioned as the body of another state that protected the body of music from the reach of the Indonesian state. Without that exile, the text could not become explicit.

Data in Table 2 shows a shift of safe space from geographic to algorithmic. In the digital era, its country of refuge is the algorithm and the network of platforms. The safe space is no longer another country, but the FYP, the recommendation column, and the curation of global platforms.

The first pattern of this algorithmic safe space can be seen in Table 2 No. 3 *Komologwe Melanesia.* This song contains the explicit phrase "*Melanesia remains in the heart"* which in the analogue era would certainly be read as a subversive threat. But in the digital era, it is safe because it is read by the algorithm as an Afrobeat coastal love song. The word Melanesia becomes unreadable as a political category.

The second pattern can be seen in Table 2 No. 5 *Reggae Music*. This song is safe and can enter global platforms like Reggaeville because the reggae genre has provided a global network infrastructure that exceeds the jurisdiction of the nation-state. Papuan music no longer competes for airtime on RRI Jayapura, but connects directly to the global reggae network. When a song produced in a bedroom in Papua is curated by a global platform, the state loses its monopoly to determine where that song is allowed to be.

The closing that locks the analogue-digital comparison:

Analog: The body had to go far away (PNG,Vanuatu,Australia, Netherland) so the text could be explicit (*Yamewero*).

Digital: The body stays in Papua (Wamena Forest, House), but the explicit text is wrapped as a party (*Lagu acara / Lagu Acak*) so it is considered not explicit by the state. Because it is wrapped as entertainment, the state has no reason to shoot. This is perfect camouflage. If in the analogue era the state knew how to shut down RRI and expel musicians to PNG, Vanuatu, Australia and Netherland, in the digital era the state itself helps spread the song through its own algorithm. Mambesak cassettes once had to be smuggled from market to market, party songs today are spread by the state's own FYP.

Conclusion: Dancing in the Midst of *Memoria Passionis*

This article departs from a long-standing paradox that haunts Papuan studies. Music is positioned by the state as an instrument of national integration through the spirit of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, yet it becomes the most persistent arena for the consolidation of identity and resistance. Previous literature has tended to frame Papuan cultural expression within the framework of *memoria passionis*, a narrative of suffering, victimization, and wound, thus failing to explain how music works as an active, creative, and joyful survival strategy in the midst of high securitization. Through a reading of Papuan music from the era of Black Brothers to contemporary musicians, this article advances the central argument that becoming imperceptible is not apathy or depoliticization. On the contrary, it is the most sophisticated and sustainable resistance strategy, which has evolved in two forms.

In the analogue era from 1976 to 1984, imperceptibility worked as a fragile shield. Arnold Ap and Black Brothers used Papuan gnomic tradition as a hidden transcript according to Scott 1990. Natural and faunal metaphors such as *Manyei Sima* and *Arbanya Ifo Amsam*, euphemisms such as *Papaso* and *tanah air*, and anonymity such as receiver *kau* (you) allowed lyrics to pass through cassette and RRI censorship. Yet this shield failed to protect the body. In the analogue regime, repression did not work by censoring text, but by censoring the body and its legible infrastructure, by closing the UNCEN museum, confiscating cassettes, and labelling the body as OPM. The execution of Ap in 1984 and exile to PNG, Vanuatu, Australia and Netherland in 1979 prove that the escape of the lyric does not guarantee the escape of the body.

In the digital era from 2010 to 2025, imperceptibility reaches its perfect form as camouflage. Learning from the trauma of the previous generation, young Papuan musicians no longer hide, but appear very brightly on YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok. By removing all securitization

keywords, this music in the form of *Lagu Acara or Lagu Acak* becomes politically illegible. Data in Table 2 shows two variants of algorithmic safe space. No 3 *Komologwe Melanesia* passes because it is read by the algorithm as an Afrobeat coastal praise, and No 5 *Reggae Music* passes because it connects directly to the global network of Reggaeville. Its production has also shifted from a legible body such as RRI and Irama Tara to an imperceptible body such as Rum Fararur, the bedroom and Wamena forest in No 6 and No 7. The state is made awkward. There is no article to prohibit dancing, no reason to ban happiness. Mambesak cassettes once had to be smuggled, party songs today are actually spread by the FYP itself.

Here the meaning of this article's title becomes clear, becoming imperceptible as a means to experience freedom. Freedom here is not political independence in the sense of a state declaration or referendum. Freedom is freedom from the shackles of fear, freedom to express, freedom to remain happy in the midst of memoria passionis, and freedom from the victim mentality and the duality of NKRI and Papua Merdeka identities. This is what I call sonic freedom, freedom that is not declared through a manifesto, but experienced in the body, in dance, and in collective singing.

This finding offers two contributions. First, for Papuan studies, it shifts the reading from *memoria passionis* toward a politics of affirmation. Becoming unreadable is not losing or being silenced. Second, for music and politics studies, the marriage of Scott and Deleuze and Guattari allows us to hear resistance that does not have to be frontal. Finally, Papuan music teaches that under prolonged surveillance, the most radical way to continue to exist is sometimes not by shouting louder, but by dancing in such a way that power forgets it is being resisted.

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