



## Digital Diasporic Self-Writing and the Imagined Nation: Constructing Indonesian Identity through @PuriViera's YouTube Vlogs

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### Abstract

This study examines how @PuriViera's YouTube vlogs construct an imagined nation from the perspective of an Indonesian woman in diaspora living in California, United States. Functioning as video epistolaries, @PuriViera's vlogs present American life through the narrator's Indonesian perspective, constructing an idealized life built through the integration of Indonesian cultural habits into an American suburban setting. In doing so, the vlogger draws on her in-between, diasporic identity to establish narrative authority and credibility, generating the desirability of the life she portrays. The study focuses on three vlogs; *Pengeluaran Seminggu di Amerika* (2025), *Sekolah TK di Amerika* (2025), and *Pesta Rumahan di Amerika* (2024), as research objects, placing them within narratological frameworks to examine the construction of imagined national identity and diasporic life through focalization, voice, and the selective deployment of tripartite capital within the vlogs as texts. The analysis demonstrates that the imagined nationhood is produced not by American material culture itself but by the narrator's Indonesian perspective, which selects, frames, and narrates American life for an Indonesian audience. The narrator's authority emerges precisely from Puri's in-between position, and her sustained Indonesianness amid American life is the specific condition that makes this imagined Indonesianness legible and credible to the audience. The study concludes that @PuriViera's vlogs operate as a utopian narrative apparatus in which the narrator's diasporic perspective is the mechanism that makes the ideal nation imaginable, displaying selected aspects of everyday Indonesian life against the amenities of the desired American social landscape as the benchmark for an ideal life.

**Keywords:** Diaspora; Self-writing; National imagination; Narrative authority; YouTube vlog

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## INTRODUCTION

The YouTube channel @PuriViera showcases an Indonesian woman's daily life in the United States following her marriage to an American man. The vlogs largely depict how she navigates life in America while maintaining her connections to Indonesian life. The host shows how she embeds Indonesian habits into everyday American life while simultaneously inserting America into Indonesian digital discourse for her Indonesian audience. A key example is the vlog PESTA RUMAHAN DI AMERIKA (2024), in which the host foregrounds her Indonesian identity through specific food choices, product selections, and engagement with the local Indonesian diaspora community, despite her established life in the United States. This practice reflects a broader trend among Indonesian diaspora women who increasingly use YouTube as a digital platform to narrate their lives abroad.

Indonesian women in diaspora widely use digital platforms, especially YouTube, to document and narrate their lives abroad (Suh, 2025). The YouTube channel @PuriViera has maintained a distinctive diasporic narrative pattern since 2016, drawing a predominantly Indonesian audience. Puri Viera, the channel's author, constructs recurring narrative patterns as an Indonesian diasporic subject in America, prompting this study to read her vlogs as a medium of self-writing that constructs the imagination of an ideal nation implicitly directed at Indonesia as her homeland and at Indonesian viewers as its target audience. Life in Indonesia carries persistent social and economic problems for much of this audience, and Puri's access to America functions as her capital for addressing that condition. She converts this access into a model, a working picture of what Indonesian social and economic life could look like if it resembled America's, rather than offering America as her personal achievement alone. To build this model, Puri uses American material as a backdrop, filtering out the complexities of hostland life such as legal precarity and economic pressure while foregrounding its utopian surfaces for an Indonesian gaze.

The utopian surface of the text is not incidental, since the imagination of the nation is a social construction produced through cultural texts and everyday practices (Vucetic & Hopf, 2020). Anderson (1991) locates the imagined nation in print media such as newspapers and novels, which allow geographically dispersed people to imagine themselves as members of the same community. Adam (2018) extends this to the Indonesian context, showing how the vernacular press connected ideas across the archipelago and spread shared ways of thinking and models of conduct among native readers—work that produced the imagined community later recognized as modern Indonesian national consciousness. @PuriViera performs a comparable function for a contemporary Indonesian audience; what changes is the medium, not the mechanism. Print gives way to digital technology, and the short story, the essay, and the novel give way to the vlog, which adds a visual dimension. Just as the vernacular press used a shared language to cross local boundaries and unify scattered readers into an imagined community, Puri's vlog uses that same vernacular language, spoken and released through episodic installments, to cross Indonesia's regional boundaries and gather a dispersed audience into one imagined community built around America as its model.

Imagining Indonesia was once made possible by the print and publishing industry, and this study claims that the same imaginative work can now be produced by a single person narrating her life on YouTube. National identity is never fixed but always becoming, produced through representation itself (Yang et al., 2021), and national belonging is reproduced through the mundane infrastructure of daily life (Skey & Billig, 2025). The nation can thus be reproduced through the recurring choice of daily-life settings rather than through explicit political statements—choices that become legible only through close attention to how the vlog itself is constructed as a text.

This study also reads the vlog as a medium of self-writing, a practice through which individuals actively form new relations with themselves rather than simply record their lives (Galea, 2014). A traditional form of self-writing is the personal letter, and Ackermans (2015) situates the vlog as a digital continuation of the epistolary form. Like a letter, a vlog is written with a specific reader in mind, and the author decides what to share and what to conceal, shaping a version of herself to fit what that reader expects. This mode of writing to a reader has migrated into the audiovisual register of the vlog, where the camera replaces the pen and the comment section replaces the postal recipient (Raisinghani & Kesur, 2024). Self-representation thus becomes an act of constructing the self (Rettberg, 2017) through active self-formation rather than deception (Kelly, 2013), building the emotional attachment that the same narrative structure is designed to

produce, the structure through which the imagination of the nation takes shape (Salmon, 2010).

National ideas enter the narrative through daily life, and their entry is shaped by comparison: national identity is built through internal imagination and external comparison, in which outsider culture serves as a benchmark for national ideals (Calhoun, 2016). Diaspora media extend this dynamic, since the non-Western gaze tends to construct the West as a simplified, idealized figure of order and modernity (Abimbola, 2024)—an image that requires a social mechanism to circulate. Bourdieu and Collier (2021) locate this mechanism in cultural capital (dispositions formed through socialization), social capital (networks of recognized relationships), and symbolic capital (the visible form these take once recognized as legitimate). In @PuriViera's vlogs, the narrator's capital deployment is what this study terms diasporic distinction: a retained Indonesian habitus combined with a practical understanding of American daily life—a combination that is scarce because neither audience nor narrator alone can reproduce it.

Diasporic distinction becomes visible when it is anchored in objects, since constructing a nation through narrative requires objects to carry meaning. Material objects carry cultural meaning, reflecting and reproducing the identities and social positions of the people who use them (Balthazar & Machado, 2020), and narrative works alongside these objects as the medium through which people construct and sustain a coherent identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative gives these objects direction, driven by what Jameson (1981) calls the utopian impulse, the idea that even the most ordinary cultural product carries a wish-image of a better world, which is precisely what the narrative project in @PuriViera's vlogs showcases.

This narrative project produces an imagined nation as a structural byproduct of how Puri positions herself as a woman in diaspora with access to what her audience largely does not. This study examines the mechanisms behind Indonesian diasporic women's desire through Genette's (1980) concept of voice and focalization, Chatman's (1978) story-discourse distinction, and Verstraten's (2009) extension of these concepts to audiovisual media, providing a framework for reading how the narrator's point of view operates in the @PuriViera vlogs.

The narrator's credibility is constructed through social positioning and rhetorical strategy (Bystrov, 2025). Bhabha (1994) argues that the colonial or postcolonial subject who imitates the dominant culture is always "almost the same, but not quite," and that this gap generates a distinctive form of agency rather than a weakness. Narrative authority in diasporic subjects therefore comes not from full belonging to either homeland or hostland, but from occupying an in-between, unstable position.

Previous studies converge on the view that this in-between position is not new territory, since self-writing and nationalism are produced through mediated representational practices, from media framing and communal imaginaries (Endiartia, 2025; Himmel & Baptista, 2020) to YouTube as digital settlement (Levy, 2023; Whyke et al., 2022) and diasporic autofiction (Adebayo, 2025; Raihanah et al., 2014), including nationalism constructed through cultural symbols in Indonesian YouTube content (Caroline et al., 2023; Susilo & Sugihartati, 2021) and home constructed through everyday practice (Budiman, 2024; Globalisasi & Tambunan, 2024). What remains unexplored is how the narrative, particularly what diaspora self-writing omits, is itself meaningful as a symptom of diasporic longing and utopian imagination. This is where this study intervenes.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This qualitative study employs narratology as its primary analytical method, supported by Susan Lanser's (1986) feminist narratology. Narratology is used to examine how narrative is constructed in the selected vlogs, particularly through the dimensions of focalization, voice, and narrative authority, while Lanser's (1986) feminist narratology provides an analytical lens for examining how gender positions the narrator's authority and shapes the narrative as it is received by its audience.

### Research Objects

The research objects are drawn from the @PuriViera YouTube channel, specifically vlogs produced within the past two years (2024–2025). The selection of this period is deliberate and analytically significant. After more than a decade of continuous production since 2016, @PuriViera's vlogs can no longer be read as an identity experiment or a culture-shock response from a newly arrived immigrant. Instead, they represent a stabilized narrative phase, a stage in which the narrator's identity construction has become consistent, patterned, and self-assured (Dunlop, 2017). Selecting the most recent vlogs allows this study to observe how the imagination of an ideal nation is produced in its most mature and consolidated form, rather than as an anxious, reactive narration from someone still adjusting to a new country. Limiting the corpus to the past two years also ensures that the social and cultural conditions embedded in the vlogs remain contemporaneous with the present moment, keeping the findings analytically relevant to current diaspora dynamics.

Three vlogs were selected as the primary research objects through purposive sampling, grounded in the representation of narrative space, in order to identify three distinct spatial categories, each functioning as a different locus for constructing the imagined ideal nation. The first criterion is the domestic or private space, represented by settings such as the home and its immediate surroundings. The second criterion is the public or consumption space, represented by settings such as supermarkets, cafes, and other outdoor public spaces. The third criterion is the reflective space, identified through moments in which the narrator explicitly articulates her identity, her longing for Indonesia, or her direct comparison between life in the two countries. Based on these criteria, the three selected vlogs are *Pengeluaran Seminggu Di Amerika* (2025), *Sekolah TK di Amerika* (2025), and *Pesta Rumahan di Amerika* (2024).

*Pengeluaran Seminggu di Amerika* (2025) depicts Puri's weekly shopping for household necessities in America, representing the public/consumption space in which American commercial material is most prominently displayed. *Sekolah TK di Amerika* (2025) narrates Puri's experience as a foster mother enrolling her foster child in an American public school, foregrounding the domestic and caregiving dimension of her life while simultaneously showcasing the quality of American public education as a marker of a well-functioning nation. *Pesta Rumahan di Amerika* (2024) depicts Puri's birthday celebration at her home with Indonesian diaspora friends, representing the reflective space in which Indonesian identity, community, and memory are most visibly articulated within the physical setting of an American home.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection proceeded in the following stages. First, all 781 videos available on the @PuriViera channel as of January 6, 2026, were viewed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the channel's overall narrative pattern and thematic tendencies. Second, only vlogs that visibly foreground Puri Viera's daily activities were retained for further consideration. Third, from this narrowed pool, vlogs were selected according to the three criteria described above, domestic space, public space, and reflective space, to ensure that each selected vlog corresponds to a distinct narrative locus. This final selection stage prevents thematic redundancy across the corpus and ensures that the three chosen vlogs

collectively yield a comprehensive, multidimensional narratological analysis rather than three variations of the same type of scene. Together, the three vlogs cover the full range of spatial and narrative registers through which the imagination of an ideal nation is constructed. Fourth, each of the three selected vlogs was subjected to close reading, in which specific scenes were rewatched multiple times to allow more careful, layered observation. Both verbal dialogue and visual or non-verbal cues were examined with equal attention. Findings were recorded systematically and organized thematically in preparation for the analytical stage.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Constructing the Ideal Nation: American Capital and Narrative Authority**

The imagined nation in @PuriViera's vlogs and the narrative authority that sustains it are produced by the same textual mechanism. Material objects, spaces, and routines are not a neutral background; people think through things, and the things a narrator chooses to display articulate values that words alone cannot carry (Hahn, 2014). Read alongside Michael Billig's (2010) concept of banal nationalism, the idea that national belonging is reproduced through the unremarkable habits of daily life, the vlog becomes a productive site of analysis because it is precisely a record of the unremarkable made visible. Yet the vlog is never neutral, because it is narrated by someone who occupies what Genette (1980) calls an autodiegetic position: both storyteller and protagonist, a position that grounds her authority in personal experience rather than external observation. What Puri controls through focalization, the filter that determines what the camera sees and whose voice enters the frame, is at once the material she deploys as capital and the credential that makes her narration of that capital believable. Following Genette (1980) and Mieke Bal as elaborated by Radhi (2022), this analysis distinguishes three dimensions of Puri within this autodiegetic structure: Puri as author, the organizing intelligence who selects and arranges footage into a finished vlog; Puri as narrator, the voice that actively addresses the audience within the text; and Puri as character, the figure depicted performing actions at the specific time and place the vlog documents. Distinguishing these three functions clarifies which register of authority is operating at each analytical moment.

The vlog reaches an Indonesian audience because it performs the same function Adam (2018) locates in the vernacular press: connecting geographically dispersed readers through a shared language. @PuriViera has produced hundreds of vlogs in Indonesian across more than a decade, and no single episode carries the imagined nation on its own; the nation accumulates across years of Puri as author releasing episodic installments that Puri as narrator addresses consistently to the same audience, much as a newspaper's daily edition builds a readership over time rather than persuading it in one sitting. What has replaced the printing press here is a camera, and what has replaced the publishing industry is a single author working alone. Yet the mechanism Anderson (1991) describes, strangers who will never meet imagining themselves into one community through a shared text, operates identically. This is the concrete sense in which imagining Indonesia no longer requires a media or publishing industry; it requires only a camera, a vernacular language, and a decade of consistency.

Before examining individual scenes, it is necessary to establish the capital structure that organizes what is shown and for whom. What Puri displays in these vlogs is not simply American objects and settings; she displays social legitimacy, the publicly visible demonstration that she can live in these spaces, shop in these stores, and enroll children in these schools as a matter of settled routine rather than exceptional access. In Bourdieu's terms, this is symbolic capital made visible: the recognized authority that comes from being positioned in a social space and being seen there without apology or

explanation. The Indonesian audience watching cannot occupy that position, and Puri does not occupy it for informational purposes; she occupies it in a way that generates desire. The vlog shows a life that appears ordered, comfortable, and achievable in its ordinariness, while the actual conditions enabling it, immigration status, class position, and social network (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), remain largely invisible. What circulates is the image of the position, not the mechanism of access, and this is what makes the vlog effective as a desire-generating apparatus.

In *Pengeluaran Seminggu Di Amerika* (2025), Puri documents her household expenditure over seven days. The camera's focalization gravitates consistently toward the interior of American supermarkets rather than any public market or street vendor; mobility throughout the vlog is exclusively by private car; the household pets are visibly well-groomed; items are selected from shelves without pausing to check prices; and the receipt appears only after the transaction is complete. This material grammar reveals a particular class position, and that class position is what makes the vlog's imaginary coherent. Puri's America is constructed from the perspective of a settled middle-class woman in diaspora, and this perspective determines what enters the frame. Her national commentary never announces itself as such. She does not say Indonesia should be like this; instead, the camera lingers on the orderly aisles of Target, the suburban quiet outside her window, and the proximity of her home to school, gym, and supermarket, noting that her house is five minutes from the school and ten minutes from the gym. This is a spatial argument about a well-organized life, delivered through the vocabulary of everyday background rather than through explicit political statements, and that is precisely what makes it effective.

The same vlog shows how capital and authority are produced by a single technique. Focalization here is almost exclusively internal to Puri: what the viewer sees is what she chooses to show, framed from her physical and ideological vantage point. Her child and husband are present in the narrative world but only partially present in the visual field, granted screen time only when she directs the camera toward them. This is the systematic expression of what Chatman (1978) calls the implied author's control over discourse, the arrangement of story elements to produce specific effects on the audience, and its effect is the concentration of narrative legitimacy in a single subject: Puri herself. Focalization here does double duty, selecting the material evidence of a comfortable life while concentrating narrative credibility in Puri as the only fully visible, fully legible subject in the frame.

The America presented in the selected vlogs is an editorially produced version: a simplified, idealized image of the West constructed from a non-Western vantage point (Carrier, 1995). This selection is not incidental but necessary to the vlog's function. The vlogs cannot narrate the full complexity of American life, its racial inequalities, its immigration bureaucracy, its costs, not simply because Puri chooses not to, but because doing so would surface the ideological contradiction at the core of the vlog's project. The ideal nation she constructs for an Indonesian audience is only imaginable through the suppression of the fact that the material conditions enabling it are themselves unequally distributed even within America (Saez & Zucman, 2016). This absence is a manifestation of the text's unconscious labor: the political unconscious of the vlog is precisely this suppression, a contradiction that cannot be resolved and therefore cannot be spoken.

In *Sekolah TK di Amerika* (2025), Puri informs her audience that public schools in California are free, that lunch is provided at no cost, that parents can access the daily menu online, and that no school uniform is required, adding the qualifier "*setidaknya yang aku tahu di California*"—at least that's what I know in California (*Sekolah TK di Amerika*, 2025). This qualifier marks the limits of her perspective while doing nothing to complicate the uniformly positive picture she has drawn. What is absent from this

narration is significant: there is no mention of resource disparities between school districts, no discussion of how public school quality is tied to local property taxes and residential segregation (Owens, 2017), and no reflection on what it means that access to a good public school depends on being able to afford to live near one, which, as *Pengeluaran Seminggu Di Amerika* (2025) shows, Puri can.

The same limitation becomes legible as a form of self-writing in the moments when Puri addresses the camera directly to describe the non-uniform policy, the free lunch provision, and the gym membership pricing. In these moments she is writing to a specific reader whose knowledge gaps she already knows, whose frame of reference includes rupiah, Indonesian schools, and Indonesian social norms. The audience is constructed as the recipient of a letter, not the viewer of a documentary, and this is what turns price information about a Californian gym into a culturally legible statement about what a comfortable life looks like. In the same vlog, Puri references her gym membership at forty dollars per month as unremarkably affordable, and a Costco ice cream bar at two dollars as cheap. Neither figure is presented as a calculation; both are delivered as casual statements about ordinary life in California. But to describe a forty-dollar membership as affordable and a two-dollar ice cream as cheap is to speak from a class position that makes those prices feel small, addressing an audience for whom the same prices carry a different experiential weight. We argue that the Indonesian audience is not learning what things cost in America; they are receiving a class signal embedded in how prices are narrated—material evidence, like the supermarket aisles and the private car, of a life in which comfort is the baseline and abundance is the unremarkable norm.

The same vlog builds Puri's authority as narrator through specific choices that position her as credible and knowledgeable. She translates the American term "Transitional Kindergarten" into the Indonesian equivalent "TK-A," then explains what it means in the American system, supplemented by on-screen text. This double gesture demonstrates that she knows both systems well enough to move between them, while positioning her audience as people who need her mediation to access this knowledge. Her authority rests not on generic knowledge about the United States but on specific knowledge of what America looks like from the inside, filtered through a sensibility that remains recognizably Indonesian. This authority is calibrated further through a communal voice. When Puri adds the qualifier "*setidaknya yang aku tahu di California*" to her description of the no-uniform policy, she speaks not as an expert but as a woman narrating domestic life in a register her audience can imaginatively occupy. Marking the limits of her knowledge does not undermine her authority; instead, it refines that authority, presenting her as an honest narrator whose specificity is a virtue.

The honest-narrator pattern also breaks the fourth wall in *Sekolah TK di Amerika* (2025) to disclose that Puri as character arrived at school early specifically to film a vlog segment. This disclosure, delivered by Puri as narrator, is brief and unemphasized, but it reveals the structural condition of everything the audience is watching: the vlog is a document of a life and also the production of one, arranged by Puri as author into the version worth recording. This is not deception but self-formation in Foucault's sense (Kelly, 2013): the same authorial hand uses the available technologies of her medium to arrange her daily activities so that the version worth recording becomes the version that is recorded. The same logic governs how time itself is handled across the corpus. The story, the events of Puri's daily life, exists independently of the vlog; the discourse, the particular arrangement and presentation of those events, is entirely within her control. In *Pengeluaran Seminggu Di Amerika* (2025), she moves between days of the week with no transitional narration. In *Pesta Rumah Di Amerika* (2024), the vlog jumps from a Friday night scene to Sunday afternoon with no account of the intervening time. These fragmentations are evidence of selection: the narrator has decided that what falls

between the cuts, the material and political texture of diaspora experience, including administrative difficulty, social and racial issues, and economic precarity (Menjívar, 2006), cannot be shown without undermining the utopian image the vlog is committed to producing. The narrative gaps are where the text's repressed political content resides, controlled by the same selective logic that decides what else the vlog withholds.

The same control over what is withheld extends to Puri's closest domestic figures. In both *Pengeluaran Seminggu Di Amerika* (2025) and *Sekolah TK Di Amerika* (2025), her child appears only from behind or with a cartoon sticker over the face, and her husband appears only in a single rear-angle shot walking toward the school. These are not privacy measures in any simple sense, since Puri's own face is never obscured while the child's body, voice, and movements remain fully present. What is withheld is specifically the face: the site where identity, emotion, and presence are most directly read by a viewer. By denying the camera access to their faces while keeping their bodies present, this focalization constructs domestic figures who confirm Puri's life without competing with her as a narrative subject. The husband exists as a background figure and the child as a ward; neither is granted the visual authority that a face-to-camera shot would produce. Puri remains the singular, fully visible subject in every frame, and every other figure is made partial, obscured, or rear-angled relative to her central position—an editorial omission repeated so consistently that it becomes structural.

Editorial omissions in the vlogs are the substance of self-writing. What is excluded—the immigration bureaucracy that conditions Puri's presence in California, the economic dependency that structures her access to suburban life, and the racial and institutional complexities of American public space—is excluded not because it did not happen but because its inclusion would contradict the version of the self the vlog is constituting. Self-writing operates through selection: the self that is written is never the totality of experience but the curated portion worth presenting to the audience being addressed. The husband who exists in Puri's life does not exist in the vlog's visuals because granting him visual presence would introduce a figure whose structural role in enabling her American life contradicts the self-writing project's central claim about the narrator as a settled, autonomous subject whose life is organized on her own terms.

The self-writing project constructs intimacy at the level of sound as well. Across all three vlogs, the background music is consistently cheerful and unhurried, framing American domestic life as comfortable and untroubled; this soundscape never turns anxious or introduces a register that competes with the visual calm on screen. This consistency is not natural to any life but the product of editorial choice—a post-production decision that layers an emotional key onto every scene. The audience experiences warmth and reliability and attributes both to Puri's character rather than to the production decisions that construct that character on screen. This is precisely how narrative authority works in digital self-writing: it presents the constructed as the natural, supplying consistent and credible scenes—the supermarket aisle, the free school, the quiet suburban street—that anchor a shared imagination of what a better national life could look like, an imagination that reaches its fullest expression in the vlog documenting Puri's home celebration.

*Pesta Rumahan Di Amerika* (2024) begins with Puri as character shopping at an American department store. The camera, directed by Puri as author, zooms in on her hand as she selects kecap ABC from the shelf, as depicted in Figure 1, a brand of Indonesian soy sauce exported to the United States. This is a small moment that is also analytically dense: the setting is an American store, the mobility to access it is provided by American infrastructure, and the economic capacity to shop there is enabled by her position in an American class bracket, but what she reaches for is Indonesian. The zoom

is a directed act of meaning-making that uses focalization to say that Indonesia is here, inside this American space, inside these shelves.

Identity as depicted in kecap ABC is a narrative achievement, sustained through the stories a person tells about herself across time. Reaching for kecap ABC is a narrative act that maintains continuity between who Puri was in Indonesia and who she is now, as is the kitchen scene in which she cooks sop iga, sate ayam, tahu bakso, gorengan, and es campur while humming a Javanese song by Happy Asmara. Indonesia is kept alive here through repetition, through the body's performance of familiar tastes, sounds, and gestures, even when the body is in California. This is the generative incompleteness Bhabha (1994) describes: Puri mimics American middle-class suburban life with considerable fluency, navigating supermarkets, the school system, and an American household, but the mimicry is always and deliberately incomplete, disrupted by the Javanese song, the reach for kecap ABC, and the automatic switch into Indonesian when diaspora friends arrive. This disruption produces her authority rather than undermining it: she is Indonesian enough to be credible to her audience and American enough to sustain the utopian frame her narration depends on, and it is this productive tension between the two that makes both her identity claim and *Pesta Rumahan Di Amerika* (2024) coherent as a text.

This same text stages Puri as character hosting her Indonesian diaspora friends at her home. Interaction among them is conducted entirely in Bahasa Indonesia, the food is Indonesian, and the post-party ritual of wrapping leftover food to take home is named explicitly by Puri as a shared cultural practice. She notes that San Diego has no Indonesian restaurant, so these monthly gatherings, held whenever someone in the community has a birthday, serve as the community's gateway to Indonesian culture through food. This is a sustained, organized effort to maintain Indonesian cultural life inside American domestic space: an ideal nation not geographically located in Indonesia but reconstituted monthly in Puri's home in California, reproduced through the same unremarkable habits—a soy sauce brand, a song hummed while cooking, a reflex to wrap and take home leftover food—that Billig locates at the heart of banal nationalism.

The same unremarkable habits also govern who the camera admits into the frame; the same visual logic extends to how Puri treats people outside the Indonesian diaspora. When interacting with non-Indonesian figures, Puri switches to English, but the camera does not follow them into the frame, as depicted on the left side of Figure 2: their voices are audible but their faces are rarely shown, and when they do appear the shot is brief and does not linger. This dissociation of sound and image is systematic across all three vlogs rather than a coincidence of editing. When Puri gathers with her Indonesian friends, by contrast, the camera is generous: faces are clearly shown and the community is visually legible as a group, as depicted on the right side of Figure 1. The result is a vlog whose visual interior remains recognizably Indonesian regardless of its American physical setting—a boundary enforced not by geography but by where the camera chooses to look and how long it chooses to stay.

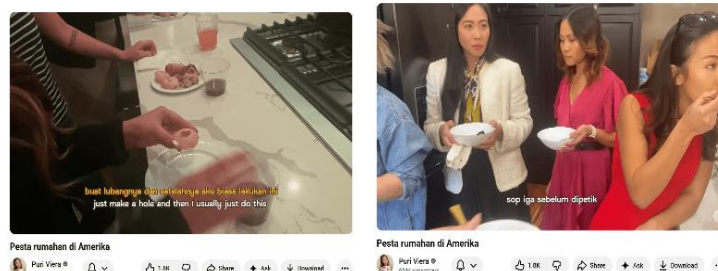


Figure 1. Focalization between when Puri gathers with non-Indonesians (left) and the Indonesian diaspora (right) in PESTA RUMAHAN DI AMERIKA (2024).

Source: @PuriViera's YouTube Channel

Authorial control over the camera extends to language. Puri as narrator also converts prices from US dollars into Indonesian rupiah when describing what she has purchased, a precise statement about her imagined audience: the conversion assumes the viewer needs the dollar figure translated to feel its weight against their own experiential standard. She performs this translation automatically, without framing it as a service, and this confirms two things at once: she knows the dollar amount because she lives it, but translates it into rupiah because she knows what rupiah feels like, the narrative authority of someone with access to both registers who can move between them on behalf of an audience with access to only one. The same dynamic appears in the advertisement segment that opens the vlog, where Puri promotes a perfume brand in English and prices it in dollars before an abrupt cut back to Indonesian content. The switch in language and currency marks the boundary between her two audiences as clearly as any explicit statement could, demonstrating that her authority is not monolithic but adaptive. She knows whom she is speaking to at each moment and adjusts her narrative voice accordingly.

What sustains the vlog's authority across all three texts is the diasporic distinction established earlier: a retained Indonesian habitus, evident in Puri's linguistic reflexes, her relationship to food and community, and her cultural memory. These dispositions are combined with an acquired working literacy in American institutions—which stores signal class position, what a California suburb implies about quality of life, and how to read American systems from the inside. Puri's credibility rests on a paradox: her audience trusts her account of America precisely because she has not fully become American. Had she assimilated fully, she would have lost the cultural legibility that makes her narration recognizable to an Indonesian audience. Her value as a narrator lies in the gap between where her body is and where her cultural allegiance remains, a position that could have been read as a liability, “not fully here, not fully there,” but is instead precisely what her narrative authority is built on. No travel documentary or immigration guide can produce the same effect, because Puri offers the lived experience of occupying that position from the inside, translated back through an Indonesian sensibility that her audience can recognize as their own.

The narrative authority that the Indonesian audience receives is displayed when they see a woman who is unambiguously Indonesian—who speaks their language, cooks their food, and observes their customs—but who does so inside a comfortable house, in an orderly neighborhood, with a child enrolled in a school that costs nothing. The implicit argument this image makes is never stated in the vlog but is structurally present: this is what Indonesian life could look like if the material conditions were different. America supplies the conditions; Indonesia supplies the culture. This is the utopian impulse embedded in the vlog as an ideological text: a genuine collective desire for a national life that is organized, equitable, and materially secure, felt and enjoyed without being directed toward its actual political conditions. Her vlog invites the audience to imagine a better Indonesia, but that imagination is satisfied by watching Puri shop at Target and send her child to a free school rather than by engaging with the structural change such conditions would actually require. The ideal nation exists in the vlog and can remain safely there—desired, consumed, and left unclaimed.

What emerges from reading these three vlogs together is that @PuriViera's narrative authority and the ideal nation it makes imaginable are not personal qualities but a single textual achievement, one in which Puri as author, narrator, and character work in concert rather than in conflict: the same woman lives the events, tells them, and

edits their telling. This achievement is produced by the restriction of focalization to Puri's own perspective, the managed visibility of other subjects, the strategic disclosure of production conditions, the translation of American experience into Indonesian terms, and the maintenance of an Indonesian cultural interior within an American material exterior. None of this is a discrete technical decision; each is an incremental act in a decade-long practice of self-writing in which every upload continues what the previous episodes began, producing a narrator who is consistent, warm, credible, and recognizably Indonesian—not because this is essentially who Puri is, but because more than a decade of episodic self-writing has made her this way for the audience that knows and trusts her. The imagined nation that emerges from the vlogs is therefore not produced by America but by this self-writing practice itself: the structural effect of a narrator who has spent ten years writing herself into the position from which that nation becomes imaginable. The audience's trust is directed at a version of Puri assembled through techniques it cannot see, and the vlog works precisely because the labor of making it appear effortless is never fully disclosed.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the three vlogs, *Pengeluaran Seminggu Di Amerika* (2025), *Sekolah Tk Di Amerika* (2025), and *Pesta Rumah Di Amerika* (2024), demonstrates that the vlog functions as a video epistolary: a form of self-writing in which American capital and Indonesian cultural identity are held in deliberate tension to produce a utopian image of what national life could look like.

The capital structure that enables Indonesia's imaginary project has been addressed as symbolic and cultural capital. The imagined nation is the structural effect of the implicit standard that materializes whenever an Indonesian audience observes an Indonesian woman living a life that their own national context does not yet provide. Therefore, the ideal nation exists because of it. Taken together, these findings suggest that @PuriViera's vlogs function as a medium through which a utopian desire specifically, the Indonesian audience's desire to see their own national life reorganized along the lines of American capital, is given a habitable image. The vlog is effective not because it tells its audience what Indonesia should be, but because it shows them what Indonesian life looks like when the material conditions are different. America supplies those conditions, while Indonesia supplies the cultural content. The ideal nation exists in the space between them, reproduced in each upload and sustained by an audience that returns because the image remains consistent, warm, and just out of reach enough to remain desirable.

## RECOMMENDATION

This study opens several avenues for future research that follow directly from its findings. A comparative study across diaspora communities is needed, expanding the corpus to include vlogs by Indonesian female diaspora creators in other Western countries such as the Netherlands or Australia, in order to test whether the simplification of hostland material and the construction of an ideal nation are patterns specific to the American context or a more systemic narrative practice among the Indonesian diaspora more broadly. In addition, future research should shift to the level of reception by treating the audience as the primary object of study—for instance, through the analysis of YouTube comments using reception theory—since the narrative authority Puri constructs does not operate in isolation but is co-constructed with her audience.

A longitudinal analysis comparing vlogs from the early period of the channel (2016–2018) with the most recent period would add a historical dimension that is absent from this study, while also mapping how the construction of the imagined nation shifts alongside changes in the sociopolitical conditions of America. Extending the analysis to

other platforms such as TikTok or Instagram Reels would also be productive, testing whether the digital epistolary mechanism still functions within much shorter and more fragmented content formats, given that the extended duration of YouTube vlogs is likely a structural condition for the workings of the imagined-nation narrative examined here.

The purposive sampling employed in this study carries an inherent element of researcher subjectivity, since different selection criteria would produce a different corpus and likely a different argument; this makes it necessary to strengthen methodological transparency in the sampling process so that the study can be replicated or critically examined. Finally, the narratives analyzed are not entirely a free expression of the subject, since changes in YouTube's algorithm and monetization policies also shape what creators produce, and this form of algorithmic pressure cannot always be identified from the text alone.

### Declaration of Using AI Tools

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were utilized during the preparation of this manuscript to support language refinement, grammar improvement, and the enhancement of clarity and coherence in academic writing. The use of AI was limited to assisting with writing-related processes and did not involve generating research data, conducting analysis, interpreting findings, or replacing the authors' intellectual contributions. All ideas, arguments, analyses, and conclusions presented in this article were developed and verified by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, ethical integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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