From Agricultural Modernization to Agrarian Mobilization: Propaganda and Peasant Empowerment in BTI Periodicals, 1947–1961

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Abstract

This article examines the changing messages of BTI periodicals, represented by a 1947 Tani cover and nine issues of Suara Tani from 1950 to 1961, concerning propaganda and peasant empowerment. Whereas studies of Indonesia's left-wing press generally focus on party newspapers or the agrarian conflicts of the early 1960s, this study treats a peasant-organization periodical as a historical actor and traces its messages from the Indonesian Revolution to the initial implementation of agrarian reform. It applies the historical method of heuristics, external and internal source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The principal sources are the cover of Tani dated 1947 and nine issues of Suara Tani published in 1950, 1958, 1959, 1960, and 1961, together with a *Kedaulatan Rakjat* report on BTI's formation. The findings reveal an interrelated transformation. The 1947 Tani cover projected mechanized agriculture, while BTI's contemporary program addressed seeds, irrigation, fertilizer, and peasant education; the issue's interior pages were unavailable for analysis. In the sampled issues from 1950 and especially 1958–1959, Suara Tani addressed organizational memory, membership consolidation, anti-colonial propaganda, political education, and the circulation of local experiences. Following the enactment of the Basic Agrarian Law and the Sharecropping Law in 1960, it increasingly provided legal literacy, agrarian advocacy, and mobilization while retaining its productivity agenda. The article's contribution lies in a source-limited periodization of BTI media and its argument that Suara Tani framed empowerment across productive, literate, legal, organizational, and political domains by combining practical knowledge with the language of class struggle. Since most of the source base was produced by the organization itself, the article distinguishes intended media effects from demonstrable audience reception.

Keywords: Barisan Tani Indonesia; propaganda; agrarian press; *Tani; Suara Tani; media history*

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Introduction

Indonesia's political independence did not immediately end the colonial and feudal agrarian structures that limited access to land, cultivators' bargaining power, and peasants' access to education and capital. Moch. Tauchid regarded the land question as a question of livelihood because the struggle over land was also a struggle over the means of life.[1] In the postindependence context, this problem intersected with the state's need to raise food production, retain plantations as a source of foreign exchange, and formulate national agrarian law. The tension between changing the structure of land control and increasing production shaped the terrain in which peasant organizations operated.

The Government Decree of 3 November 1945 encouraged the formation of political parties while peasant organizing was already underway. Amid the mobilization of the Indonesian Revolution, peasants were not merely an economic group but a social base contested by various political forces. A BTI organization had been declared in Yogyakarta on 28 October 1945; the Peasants' Congress there on 22–25 November approved BTI as a national organization on 25 November. A report in *Kedaulatan Rakjat* recorded the congress's decisions on merging peasant organizations, a program to defend the Republic, improving peasants' conditions, and establishing a central leadership.[2] Willy Alfarius's study shows that, during the revolutionary phase, BTI had already proposed agricultural modernization as an important part of its welfare program, although the war constrained implementation.[3] BTI used periodicals to connect its leadership with branches and circulate its program. The available 1947 cover bears the masthead Tani, while the sampled issues from 1950 onward bear Suara Tani; the exact publication relationship between these mastheads is not established by the supplied cover alone.

The magazine's position must be situated in the history of the Indonesian press. From the 1950s to the early 1960s, the press became an arena of competition among nationalist, Islamic, communist, and military ideas. Political affiliation influenced news selection, editorial style, and the limits of press freedom, while under Guided Democracy the government increasingly demanded that the press become part of the revolution.[4] Andi Suwirta shows that press life in 1950–1965 moved between freedom and national responsibility, with the media serving as an arena for contesting opinion

[1] Moch. Tauchid, *Masalah Agraria sebagai Masalah Penghidupan dan Kemakmuran Rakyat Indonesia*, 3rd ed. (Yogyakarta: STPN dan Pewarta, 2009), 451.

[2] *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, "Poetoesan Kongres Tani," 27 November 1945.

[3] Willy Alfarius, "Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) pada Masa Revolusi Indonesia, 1945–1950," *Lembaran Sejarah* 19, no. 1 (2023): 78–98, https://doi.org/10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.90299.

[4] Edward C. Smith, *Sejarah Pembredelan Pers di Indonesia*, trans. Atmakusumah (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1983), 117–121.

in accordance with the political configuration of the period.[5] In this landscape, *Suara Tani* had a distinctive readership: it spoke as a "madjalah kaum tani," linking national policy to rural language, experience, and interests.

Previous research has established several important foundations but has not adequately addressed the historical changes in BTI's media. Noer Fauzi situates the peasant movement within the course of agrarian politics and the changing relationship between peasants and rulers.[6] Edward C. Smith and Andi Suwirta discuss the political structure of the press and its restrictions. Through a study of *Harian Rakjat*, Akbar Ridwan shows how the PKI newspaper was used to shape opinion, disseminate party ideology, and respond to government policy in 1959–1965.[7] Alfarius, meanwhile, describes BTI's formation and program in 1945–1950. These studies explain agrarian history, press politics, party media, or the BTI organization, but they have not brought together, longitudinally, the 1947 modernization imagery alongside changes in Suara Tani's sections, communication strategies, and language of "empowerment" from 1950 to 1961.

This gap matters because calling *Suara Tani* merely a "propaganda tool" can easily reduce the magazine's contents to political agitation. Conversely, describing the magazine as a medium of "empowerment" can produce a normative claim unless it is tested against changes in its contents and context. This article therefore asks two questions: how did the available BTI periodicals develop as organizational media in 1947–1961; and how did the magazine formulate propaganda as a practice of peasant empowerment? Its aim is to reconstruct changes in the magazine's function and explain the relationship among agricultural knowledge, political education, legal advocacy, and mass organizing.

The study's novelty lies in a periodization based on one 1947 cover and nine later issues that traces the imagery of agricultural modernization and the growing prominence of agrarian mobilization, alongside continuity between the two. The article's central argument is that the sampled Suara Tani issues did not simply replace technical education with political propaganda. Instead, they linked the two: productivity, mutual assistance, literacy campaigns, organizational identity, anti-colonialism, and agrarian reform were woven together as a single project of forming peasant subjects. Propaganda worked not only through slogans but also through practical sections, regional reports, legal explanations, exemplary figures, and social classifications. Yet, as an organizational medium, *Suara Tani* primarily provides

[5] Andi Suwirta, "Dinamika Kehidupan Pers di Indonesia pada Year 1950–1965: Antara Kebebasan dan Tanggung Jawab Nasional," *SOSIOHUMANIKA* 1, no. 2 (2008): 48–70.

[6] Noer Fauzi, *Petani dan Penguasa: Dinamika Perjalanan Politik Agraria Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Insist dan KPA, 1999), 131–134.

[7] Akbar Ridwan, "*Harian Rakjat*: Alat Propaganda Partai Komunis Indonesia 1959–1965" (Universitas Diponegoro, 2019).

evidence of BTI's intentions, strategies, and representations; claims about its actual effects must be limited by the available evidence of reception.

Method

This research employs the historical method, which encompasses four primary stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Kuntowijoyo defines these four stages as a procedure for gathering traces of the past, testing their validity, establishing connections between facts, and constructing a historical reconstruction.[8] The heuristic stage was conducted by searching through the *Khastara* digital collection of the National Library of Indonesia, as well as collections from several other libraries. The primary corpus consists of ten extant copies: an issue of *Tani* dated June 15, 1947, and nine issues of *Suara Tani* published on November 25, 1950; January, May, July, August, and October 1958; November 1959; November 1960; and December 1961. As the interior pages for the 1947 issue were unavailable in the initial search data, the editorial content—and its continuity with the newspaper's masthead in later editions—could not be directly verified. Given that the archives were accessed on June 25–26, 2024, evidence of earlier data retrieval is required to establish this corpus as a fully integrated collection as of October 31, 2024. An additional primary source utilized is the November 27, 1945, edition of *Kedaulatan Rakjat*.[9] Secondary sources include books and studies concerning agrarian history, the *Barisan Tani Indonesia* (BTI), the Indonesian press, the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), propaganda, and hegemony.

External criticism was applied to the identity of the issues, year, number, date, physical condition, and legibility of the documents. The later magazine copies vary in condition: some are well preserved, while others are yellowed, stained, or torn at the edges; the 1947 item was available as a cover only. The critique also compares the descriptions provided in the appendix with the newspapers' mastheads; for instance, the July 1958 issue is identified by its masthead as Year IX, No. 7—rather than Year XI, as stated in one of the inventory lists. Meanwhile, the masthead of the 1947 issue bears the name *Tani*, rather than *Soeara Tani* as recorded in the initial description. Internal criticism focused on old spelling, consistency of content, the authors' positions, and the publisher's interests. Because *Suara Tani* was published by BTI's

[8] Kuntowijoyo, *Metodologi Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2003), 109; Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2005), 103.

[9] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Tani (Tengah Boelanan), surviving cover, Year II, no. 1 (15 Juni 1947)*; Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year V, no. 8/9 (25 November 1950); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 1 (Januari 1958); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 4/5 (Mei 1958); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 7 (22 Juli 1958); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 8/9 (Agustus 1958); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 10 (Oktober 1958); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year X, no. 11 (November 1959); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year XI, no. 11 (November 1960); Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year XII, no. 12 (Desember 1961); dan *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, "Poetoesan Kongres Tani," 27 November 1945.

central executive board (DPP BTI), editorials, regional reports, and claims of success were treated as organizational representations and strategies rather than neutral reports. Statements about impact were also distinguished between outcomes claimed by the magazine and reception that could be demonstrated.

Interpretation uses Harold D. Lasswell's communication formula, *who says what in which channel to whom with what effect*, to identify the actors, messages, channels, audiences, and intended effects.[10] Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony is used in a limited way to understand BTI's attempt to build consent, a shared language, and counterhegemony against feudal elites and colonial capital.[11] Both concepts are used at the interpretive stage, not as additional methods. The historiography is organized chronologically and thematically: the birth of the medium, changes in its sections, forms of empowerment, and *Suara Tani*'s place in the historiography of the Indonesian press and agrarian movement.

Results

From the formation of BTI to an organizational medium, 1945–1950

The development of BTI's periodicals was related to the formation of its network. The Peasants' Congress of November 1945 sought to unite peasant organizations and place the defense of the Republic, improvement of production, and peasant welfare within a single program. The press became a means of overcoming the distance between the central leadership, branches, and village base. In the revolutionary situation, this communicative function mattered because organizational decisions, regional experiences, and ideas of modern agriculture needed a channel that could be reproduced and carried beyond the congress.

The surviving cover of Tani dated 15 June 1947 shows an initial visual orientation. It depicts a tractor in a rice field, accompanied by words linking technical progress to struggle, willingness to work, strength, thought, unity, and public prosperity. Its interior pages were not available, so claims about the issue's discussion of seeds, irrigation, fertilizer, pest control, extension work, and cooperatives cannot be verified from this copy. These themes belong to the Two-Year Program adopted at BTI's First Congress in Jember, 29 December 1946–1 January 1947, which placed modernization, taxation, agrarian renewal, and education on the organization's

[10] Harold D. Lasswell, *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 217.

[11] Antonio Gramsci, *Risalah Penjara: Hegemoni, Negara, dan Masyarakat Madani*, trans. A. F. Anwar (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2003), 17.

agenda. Thus the cover is consistent with, but cannot independently establish the detailed contents of, that program.[12][13]

The special issue of 25 November 1950 turned BTI's five years of experience into organizational memory. The editorial "5 Tahun Berdirinja BTI" appeared alongside Tjokronegoro's speech, anniversary greetings, discussions of sugar, village development, land tax, and the role of peasants.[14] This arrangement reveals two functions operating together: looking back on the organization's struggle and educating readers about concrete village problems. By recalling BTI's origins, figures, and agenda, the magazine formed a collective identity; by covering taxes, production, and village development, it maintained its welfare orientation.



Figure 1. Contrasting visual emphases in BTI periodicals.Left: surviving cover of Tani, 15 June 1947, with modern farming equipment.Right: the front page of the November 1960 issue, linking BTI's anniversary, the Revolution of 17 August 1945, and MANIPOL-USDEK.

The difference between the 1947 cover and the 1950 issue suggests a change in the emphasis visible in the surviving BTI media. In 1947, when armed revolution constrained program implementation, the surviving machinery illustration projected a future in which independence would bring new ways of farming and a new standard of living. In 1950, after the recognition of sovereignty, the medium could assess the organization's course and reconstruct its legitimacy. The anniversary served as an internal marker of time linking the experience of war, development problems, and postrevolutionary organizational work. Thus, the 1950 editorial did more than follow national chronology: it presented BTI's own history as a basis for shared identity, although audience response remains unknown.

[12] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Tani (Tengah Boelanan), surviving cover, Year II, no. 1 (15 Juni 1947)*.

[13] Ahmad Nashih Lutfi, *Melacak Jejak Sejarah Pemikiran Agraria: Sumbangan Pemikiran Mazhab Bogor* (Sleman: STPN Press, Pustaka Ifada, dan SAINS, 2011), 42–46.

[14] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year V, no. 8/9 (25 November 1950).

The material form of the issues also supported this function. Covers, illustrations, large headlines, and a mixture of long articles and short news items offered several points of entry for readers with different levels of literacy. The visual evidence presented in the appendix shows that an image of a tractor and a rice field serves as a prominent feature on the cover of the surviving 1947 edition. Compared with the 1960 front page featuring portraits of leaders, the organization's anniversary, and MANIPOL-USDEK, this visual contrast suggests a change in the sampled BTI media's emphasis from demonstrating technical progress to affirming a political position. A comparison of two covers cannot establish a continuous editorial trajectory; the later issues provide the substantive evidence for changing sections.

Expansion of sections and politicization of the message in 1958

Five sampled issues from 1958 show *Suara Tani*'s widening scope. The January issue carried the editorial "Bersatu untuk Melikwidasi Kolonialisme Belanda," supporting the removal of the remaining colonial economic power.[15] Anti-colonialism was translated into agrarian terms: foreign capital, plantation concessions, and control of land were presented as problems directly affecting cultivators. Thus, national issues appeared not as an insertion but as a framework for understanding rural poverty.

The May 1958 issue shows the relationship between basic and political education. The article "Timbangan Buku Tuntunan Pemberantasan Butahuruf dan Obor PBH" assessed teaching materials not only for ease of reading but for their relevance to poverty, agrarian inequality, solidarity, and land rights.[16] The eradication of illiteracy was therefore understood as opening access to the language of organization and politics. In the same issue, writings on mutual assistance and economic organization encouraged collective work without immediately abolishing individual ownership of land and tools. Work teams, records of labor contributions, exchanges of experience, distribution of seeds, procurement of fertilizer, and pest control were presented as collective practices that protected poor peasants from dependence on middlemen.[17] Technical education remained, but acquired political meaning as a means of self-reliance.

The issue of 22 July 1958 brought global, national, and village issues together. The speech "Presiden Soekarno: Saja Protes" rejected atomic and hydrogen bomb tests, while other articles linked peace, anti-imperialism, PRRI/Permesta, and Indonesian sovereignty.[18] At the same time, the magazine reported the establishment

[15] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 1 (Januari 1958).

[16] Barisan Tani Indonesia, "Timbangan Buku Tuntunan Pemberantasan Butahuruf dan Obor PBH," *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 4/5 (Mei 1958).

[17] Asmoe, "Membangun Koperasi Gotong-Royong di Tingkat Basis," *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 4/5 (Mei 1958), 11.

[18] "Presiden Sukarno: Saja Protes," *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 7 (22 Juli 1958), 1.

of the First Agricultural Seminar Committee in Pasarminggu, bringing together experts, the government, and peasant organizations to discuss food production, household plots, seedling cultivation, and pest control.[19] Opposition to imperialism and increased production were thus not separated: both were constructed as elements of sovereignty.

The August issue expanded the role of regional reports. News about collective housebuilding, branch meetings, land disputes, and rural security appeared alongside commemorations of the Proclamation and calls for national unity.[20] The magazine also described remnants of feudalism, land rent, advance-sale debt (ijon), compulsory rice sales, and private estates. Local experiences were not left isolated; publication turned village cases into organizational knowledge that other branches could read. This pattern made the medium a vertical channel from the center to members as well as a horizontal channel between regions.

The sequence from January to October 1958 reveals a broader causality. National political conflicts and regional security led BTI to emphasize national unity; plantation disputes and debate over liquidating Dutch interests strengthened anti-colonial rhetoric; and the need for food kept seminars, irrigation, fertilizer, seeds, and mutual assistance on the agenda. The editors did not treat these three fields as separate themes. Political sovereignty was understood to require the liquidation of colonial economic power, while economic sovereignty required peasant organization and increased production. This linking of cause and effect made propaganda relevant to village life: distant threats were explained through their consequences for land, prices, security, and harvests.

In October 1958, opposition to the Foreign Investment Law was combined with reports of plantation conflicts, criticism of village officials, collective repair of irrigation channels, the use of compost and seeds, and peasant innovations.[21] Anti-imperialist diction framed economic news, while the production sections gave practical content to the idea of self-reliance (berdikari). The arrangement of sections in 1958 therefore does not indicate the disappearance of agricultural education. What occurred was the politicization of knowledge: techniques, organization, and market problems were explained through relations of power among peasants, the state, landlords, middlemen, and foreign capital.

[19] Panitia Seminar, "Menudju Swasembada Beras: Seminar Pertanian Pertama Pasarminggu dan Penghapusan Sistem Idjon di Nusatenggara," *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 7 (Juli 1958), 10–11.

[20] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 8/9 (Agustus 1958).

[21] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year IX, no. 10 (Oktober 1958).

Consolidation, agrarian literacy, and mobilization, 1959–1961

The November 1959 issue made organizational expansion its main theme through the editorial "Perkuat-Peluas BTI." The magazine urged cadres to "turun ke bawah" and understand peasants' concrete experiences rather than merely repeat the program in abstract language. One instruction warned that action by a small number of activists without the participation of most peasants would alienate the organization from the masses. [22] This message shows that propaganda was understood as organizing work: cadres had to use local language, listen to everyday problems, test social classifications, and connect small demands to a broader program.

The 6:4 crop-sharing campaign shows the importance of classification in the magazine's language. *Suara Tani* distinguished landlords from peasants who worked their own land and warned that identifying the wrong targets would disrupt the movement.[23] Here the medium served as a guide to action: class terms were not merely agitational labels but were elaborated as criteria for directing demands over rent and crop-sharing. Reports of land damage, evictions, and disputes became evidence selected by the editors to justify the urgency of agrarian advocacy.

The enactment of Law No. 5 of 1960 on Basic Agrarian Principles and Law No. 2 of 1960 on Sharecropping Agreements changed the language of struggle.[24] Demands previously framed primarily in terms of social justice now gained a legal reference. The November 1960 issue featured "BTI Setia pada Revolusi 17 Agustus 1945," "MANIPOL-USDEK di Desa-desa," and a message from D. N. Aidit urging BTI to prioritize agricultural laborers and poor peasants without neglecting middle peasants. The program mentioned reducing land rents and loan interest while raising agricultural laborers' wages.[25] Bringing the language of the state revolution together with agrarian demands allowed BTI to present its program as implementation of the revolution's official direction, rather than merely a sectional interest.

The magazine also explained implementation of sharecropping agreements and encouraged the formation of advisory committees at the subdistrict level. Reports from Indramayu, West Lombok, and Muara Enim show how national rules became questions involving officials, cultivators, landowners, and peasant organizations locally.[26] Such explanations fostered legal literacy: readers were introduced to rights,

[22] Barisan Tani Indonesia, *Suara Tani*, Year X, no. 11 (November 1959).

[23] Redaksi *Suara Tani*, "Kriteria Menetapkan Tuan Tanah dan Gerakan Aksi 6–4," *Suara Tani*, Year X, no. 11 (November 1959), 12.

[24] Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 5 Year 1960 tentang Peraturan Dasar Pokok-Pokok Agraria*, Lembaran Negara Republik Indonesia Year 1960 Nomor 104; Republik Indonesia, *Undang-Undang Nomor 2 Year 1960 tentang Perjanjian Bagi Hasil*.

[25] D. N. Aidit, "Pesan Peringatan Ulang Year BTI Ke-15," *Suara Tani*, Year XI, no. 11 (November 1960), 4.

[26] Redaksi *Suara Tani*, "Pengawalan Pelaksanaan UU No. 2 Year 1960 di Daerah-Daerah," *Suara Tani*, Year XI, no. 11 (November 1960), 18.

channels for complaints, and institutions involved in enforcing the regulations. At the same time, profiles of "Pahlawan Produksi," "Rabuk Serbaguna" fertilizer, seeds, and methods for increasing yields continued to appear.[27] The continuity of production sections underscores that agrarian mobilization did not erase the technical agenda.

The December 1961 issue carried legal literacy into monitoring the implementation of land reform. The magazine discussed Government Regulation No. 224 of 1961, disputes in Boyolali and Jember, and demands that peasant representatives participate in land reform committees.[28] Advocacy also extended to coastal communities. "Aksi Kaum Nelajan Kalahkan Tengkulak Ikan" reported on organizing fishers in Dumai to confront fish middlemen and seek alternative ways to market their catch.[29] By including fishers, the magazine broadened the meaning of the peasant masses to encompass rural and coastal producers facing market intermediaries.

The transition from demands to monitoring the law was an important change. Before 1960, agrarian justice was articulated mainly through criticism of rent, ijon, evictions, private estates, and foreign capital. Once a national legal basis existed, regional reports could be framed as assessments of state implementation: who formed committees, who rejected crop-sharing, and how peasant organizations demanded representation. Legality did not remove mobilization; it gave it a new vocabulary, institutions, and procedures. Conversely, mobilization exerted pressure to prevent regulations from remaining mere text. This relationship explains why legal literacy and organizational consolidation appeared together in the issues of 1960–1961.

These changes in content can be summarized as follows.

Phase	Indicative issues	Dominant orientation	Forms of empowerment offered
1947	Tani cover, Year II, no. 1	Agricultural modernization imagery; interior unavailable	Tractor illustration; BTI program discussed in other sources
1950	Year V, no. 8/9	Organizational memory and legitimacy	Collective identity, taxation, village development, the role of peasants
1958	Year IX, nos. 1, 4/5, 7, 8/9, 10	Anti colonialism, literacy, regional reports, and production	Literacy campaigns, mutual assistance, seminars, advocacy in conflicts, interregional communication

[27] Redaksi *Suara Tani*, "Pahlawan Produksi BTI," *Suara Tani*, Year XI, no. 11 (November 1960), 14.

[28] Redaksi *Suara Tani*, "Laporan Penindakan Pelanggaran Landreform di Boyolali dan Jember," *Suara Tani*, Year XII, no. 12 (Desember 1961), 12.

[29] Redaksi *Suara Tani*, "Aksi Kaum Nelajan Kalahkan Tengkulak Ikan," *Suara Tani*, Year XII, no. 12 (Desember 1961), 20.

1959	Year X, no. 11	Consolidation and organizational guidance	Going down to the grassroots, membership expansion, social classification, 6:4 crop-sharing campaign
1960–1961	Year XI, no. 11; Year XII, no. 12	Legal literacy and mobilization for agrarian reform	Explanation of UUPA/UUPBH, monitoring implementation, land reform committees, demands of agricultural laborers and fishers

Discussion

Propaganda as the organization of knowledge

The findings above show that *Suara Tani*'s propaganda cannot adequately be described as the dissemination of slogans. In Lasswell's framework, the actors (*who*) were DPP BTI, the editors, PKI/BTI leaders, section writers, and contributors of regional reports. The messages (*says what*) included agricultural modernization, anti-colonialism, worker-peasant unity, BTI identity, class classification, agrarian rights, and implementation of the law. The channel (*in which channel*) was a periodical magazine intended to circulate through the organization's networks; evidence of specific reading practices is unavailable. The intended audience (*to whom*) consisted chiefly of agricultural laborers, poor peasants, middle peasants, cadres, and, in 1961, groups of fishers. The intended effects (*with what effect*) were increased knowledge, solidarity, organizational discipline, courage to demand rights, and participation in BTI programs.

This mapping shows that the main technique of propaganda was not simply ideological repetition but the organization of knowledge. The editors translated large issues—colonialism, the Cold War, agrarian laws—into consequences in rice fields, markets, irrigation channels, sharecropping agreements, or village meetings. Conversely, local cases were published as evidence for a national narrative. This two-way process made propaganda useful: readers were invited to understand individual experiences as shared problems and to see the organizational program as a path toward resolving them. In this respect, *Suara Tani* was more specialized than *Harian Rakjat*. Whereas Ridwan's study shows *Harian Rakjat* functioning as the PKI's voice across issues, *Suara Tani* translated left-wing political positions into the vocabulary of production and rural social relations.

The structure of the message also clarifies the relationship among information, education, and influence. The informative function appears in regional reports, policy, seminars, and farming techniques; the educational function in literacy campaigns, courses, legal explanations, and social classification; and the persuasive function in editorials, slogans, exemplary figures, and organizational appeals.[30] These three did

[30] Djafar H. Assegaff, *Jurnalistik Masa Kini* (Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia, 1983), 127.

not operate independently. News about fertilizer or irrigation could both educate readers and build BTI's image as a useful organization; reports of disputes could both inform and generate solidarity and anger. Thus, the boundary between "extension work" and "propaganda" within the magazine was fluid.

Layered empowerment and counterhegemony

Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps explain why language mattered. BTI did not merely oppose control of land but sought to change how peasants understood poverty, work, and citizenship. Terms such as "exploitation," "landlord," "loan shark," "imperialism," and "unity" provided a vocabulary for naming power relations. Technical, legal, and regional sections then offered examples of how this vocabulary could be used. In this sense, *Suara Tani* built counterhegemony: it challenged the assumption that rural inequality was a natural condition and offered a peasant identity as producers, citizens, and a force of revolution.

That counterhegemony was not built through abstract theory alone. "Pahlawan Produksi" figures, stories of mutual assistance, successful dispute resolution, and reports of innovation offered models of action to emulate. The use of spelling and expressions familiar to readers, together with the recommendation that cadres master regional languages, shows an effort to gain consent rather than simply issue orders from the center. The medium can be interpreted as part of a "war of position" in the countryside: BTI sought to establish moral and intellectual leadership through education, example, and organizational networks, while continuing to use confrontational rhetoric toward its political opponents.

From this perspective, the empowerment promoted by the magazine can be divided into five layers. First, productive empowerment through seeds, fertilizer, irrigation, tools, pest control, and mutual assistance. Second, literacy empowerment through reading and writing campaigns that combined basic literacy with an understanding of social problems. Third, legal empowerment through explanations of cultivators' rights, crop-sharing, and land reform mechanisms. Fourth, organizational empowerment through membership cards, meetings, branch expansion, regional reports, and the method of going down to the grassroots. Fifth, political empowerment through anti-colonialism, worker-peasant unity, and positioning peasants as actors in the revolution. These five layers reinforced one another: literacy opened access to the law; organization disseminated knowledge; production techniques offered practical goals; and political language linked local action to the national agenda.

Continuity, change, and the limits of the evidence

The periodization of 1947–1961 corrects two overly simple readings. First, *the sampled BTI media did not solely present agrarian mobilization.* The surviving 1947 Tani

cover centered modernization imagery, while the 1950 Suara Tani issue strengthened organizational memory and legitimacy; no editorial analysis of the missing 1947 interior is possible. Second, politicization in the late 1950s did not entirely displace production. In 1960, when MANIPOL-USDEK, UUPA, and UUPBH became the dominant language, sections on fertilizer, seeds, and production heroes remained. The change lay in how technical knowledge was framed: increased yields were increasingly linked to self-reliance, opposition to ijon, fair distribution, and the success of the revolution.

The relationship between the medium and its context was also causal but not mechanical. PRRI/Permesta tensions, anti-colonial campaigns, foreign investment, the 1959 Presidential Decree, MANIPOL-USDEK, and agrarian legislation provided opportunities and constraints for the editors. *Suara Tani* adapted its contents to these events while seeking, through editorials and reports, to guide members' responses. The actors were not only central leaders: Asmoe, D. N. Aidit, technical writers, regional officials, innovative peasants such as Krisman, and groups of fishers appeared as producers or objects of knowledge. This diversity of actors makes the magazine an archive of how the organization constructed peasant agency.

Organizational sources, however, have limits. Circulation figures, membership growth, successful disputes, or changes in awareness reported by the magazine may indicate reach and claimed effects, but they do not in themselves prove readers' reception. This corpus contains no systematic readers' letters, complete distribution records, reader interviews, or sufficient local comparative sources to measure the extent to which its messages changed behavior. Accordingly, this article draws firm conclusions about empowerment strategies and intended effects but is more cautious about actual impact. This caution does not diminish *Suara Tani*'s importance; rather, internal criticism locates it properly as a source for the history of the production of discourse, organization, and agrarian aspirations.

In the historiography of the Indonesian press, these findings shift attention beyond the relationship between the press and the state to that between organizational media and rural communities. In agrarian historiography, the article shows that the struggle over land was also a struggle over information: who could read the law, define class, connect cases across regions, and name injustice. *Suara Tani* is a novel object of study not merely because it is an understudied medium, but because changes in its sections show how propaganda, education, and advocacy were woven into the infrastructure of a social movement.

This position both connects the present study with, and distinguishes it from, earlier historiography. Alfarius explains the strength of modernization ideas in BTI's early phase, while Fauzi places peasant organizations within a longer agrarian political conflict. Ridwan's study shows the propagandistic character of PKI media

under Guided Democracy. The *Suara Tani* corpus connects these three fields along a single trajectory of change: the modernization program did not disappear as agrarian conflict intensified, while political propaganda did not always take the form of commentary on large-scale issues because it was translated into techniques, law, and village experiences. Thus, a peasant organization's medium occupied a place between the party press, extension materials, and a guide to movement activity—a hybrid form less visible when press history follows only national publishers or state censorship policies.

This hybridity also explains the internal tension in the concept of empowerment. The knowledge provided by the magazine could expand readers' capacities, but the selection of information was still directed by BTI's interests. Legal language opened possibilities for defending cultivators' rights, yet classifications of allies and opponents also simplified the diversity of village social relations. Mutual assistance could strengthen self-reliance, but it was also a means of organizational consolidation. Therefore, empowerment and propaganda were not mutually exclusive categories. In *Suara Tani*, they overlapped: practical benefits built the organization's political authority, while political orientation determined which practical knowledge was selected and how it was explained.

Conclusion

The sampled BTI media move from modernization imagery on the surviving 1947 Tani cover to Suara Tani issues integrating technical education, organizational memory, anti-colonial propaganda, literacy, legal advocacy, and agrarian mobilization. The change in the available evidence runs from the 1947 cover to the 1950 issue and the politicization of sections in 1958–1959, followed by monitoring of UUPA and UUPBH in 1960–1961. Although political language became increasingly dominant, the agendas of production, innovation, and mutual assistance did not disappear; all were reframed as part of self-reliance and agrarian justice.

The article's main finding is that the sampled Suara Tani issues framed empowerment as productive, literacy-related, legal, organizational, and political. Its historiographical contribution lies in treating a peasant organization's medium as an actor connecting state policy, organizational programs, and local experiences. Its contribution is a qualified periodization of the sampled media and an account of continuity between modernization and mobilization; the missing 1947 interior and unresolved masthead relationship limit claims of continuous editorial change. At the same time, source criticism requires a distinction between the effects intended by the editors and the actual impact on readers. Within that limit, *Suara Tani* shows how print media could become an infrastructure of knowledge and organization in the history of Indonesia's agrarian movement.

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