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Cultural Hegemony in Film CODA 2021: A Gramscian Analysis

[1]Kharisma Dwi Oktavia*, [2]Sulasih Nurhayati, [3]Widya Nirmalawati, [4]Titik Wahyuningsih

[1]*Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia*
[2]*Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia*
[3]*Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia*
[4]*Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Indonesia*

*Corresponding Author, Email: rsmaadvoktaviaa@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Films, as a form of popular culture, have the ability to influence social perceptions and ideologies. In today's digital world, films have become more than mere entertainment; they are important objects of media studies. This research analyzes the movie "CODA" (2021) by Sian Heder. The story is about the Rossi family, where Ruby is the only member of the family who can hear. This study aims to highlight how cultural hegemony shapes the mindset of the Rossi family, who exist as a subaltern group of fishermen, while navigating the realities of audism and how spatial negotiation forms between Deaf people and audistic culture. This study uses theoretical thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret data from seven scenes depicting key moments of cultural conflict and negotiation between the Rossi family and the hearing community, guided by Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. The research illustrates how "CODA" (2021) exemplifies counter-hegemony resistance by the Deaf family, who are not merely passive subalterns but active agents of resistance against economic inequality and cultural exclusion in society.

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Introduction

In today's society, films have evolved from mere sources of entertainment of cultural texts that shape, disseminate, and reinforce ideology. As products of popular culture, films reflect the power relations embedded in society while simultaneously shaping public perspectives and collective consciousness (Supiarza et al., 2020). From a Gramscian perspective, popular culture constitutes an important site where dominant ideologies are reproduced and legitimized, making film a significant object of cultural analysis (Litowitz, 2000). This perspective provides a powerful framework for examining how films construct social reality and influence how society views certain groups, including minorities. The term "minority" refers to people representing less than half the population, distinguished by clear and relevant distinguishing characteristics (Ruiz Vieytez, 2016).

Among the minority groups increasingly depicted in contemporary cinema, Deaf people offer a compelling case for understanding how power, identity, and cultural difference are mediated through film. Sian Heder frequently portrays characters who are often "unheard" and "unseen" in mainstream cinema. CODA (2021), short for "Child of Deaf Adults," is her most well-known work. It is a 2014 adaptation of the French comedy drama *La Famille Bélier* (Sumarsono et al., 2024). CODA emerges as an interesting phenomenon because it presenting a boarder picture of minority group such a Deaf culture, no longer just as a symbol or object of sympathy but though deep and realistic character, it gives deaf actors a space in mainstream cinema, giving them voice (Singh, 2023).

The story follows Ruby Rossi, the only hearing member of a Deaf family, who constantly negotiates between her personal aspirations and her responsibilities as an interpreter for her family. The film portrays multiple forms of structural inequality by illustrating the Family's dependence on Ruby for communication and their economic struggles as working-class fishermen. Beyond linguistic barriers associated with audism, the film also depicts unequal economic relations that shape the everyday lives of the Rossi family. As Tripp (2023) argues, CODA occupy a unique position because they navigate both Deaf and hearing worlds simultaneously. Despite their functional privilege of hearing, their identities remain closely tied to Deaf culture. As a result, CODA frequently negotiate between two contrasting cultural systems, balancing the dominant expectations shaped by audism with the cultural values.

It will be important for us to define the place of the subaltern within society before we explore the idea of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argues that subaltern groups remain subject to the activities of dominant groups even when they attempt to resist, as their struggles continue to be constrained by existing relations of power (Gramsci,

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1971, p. 55). In modern usage, the subaltern refers to marginalized groups that lack affiliation with the structures of governance through which rights and political participation are exercised (Thomas, 2018). According to Gramsci (1971), the supremacy of a dominant group depends on two mechanisms: control over opposing groups and intellectual and moral leadership over allied groups (pp. 57–58)

According to Cortes-Ramirez (2015), hegemony works through intellectual and moral leadership, whereby the dominant class secures the consent of subordinate groups. Domination does not happen through coercion alone but through the adoption of the dominant class worldview into people's lives(Litowitz, 2000). This means the dominant group's ideas and experiences become the norm, while those of the other group become marginal (Lears, 1985). Today, scholars have suggested that the idea of cultural hegemony is applicable in looking at inequality of power based on race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, and others (Sardar, 2024)

Within Deaf Studies, one manifestation of cultural hegemony is audism, an ideology that validates hearing and speech as the social norm and therefore marginalises Deaf people and sign language (Bauman, 2004; Hauser et al., 2010; Alahasawi, 2016). Reagan (2019) argues that deafness has traditionally been understood through the medical model, which frames deafness as a deficit while positioning hearing as the normative human condition. As Dolnick (1993, as cited in Reagan, 2019) observes, many Deaf people understand themselves as members of a distinct linguistic and cultural community. Higgins and Lieberman (2016), support this assertion by stating that Deaf people possess their language, history, and traditions. Therefore, the notion of audism works in a hegemonic manner where it privileges hearing and speech over deafness and sign language.

Gramsci (1971) distinguishes between domination exercised through coercion, that is, force or structural constraint, and domination secured through consent, in which the worldview of a dominant group is accepted as legitimate common sense. This distinction is central to the analysis that follows (Lears, 1985; Litowitz. 2000; Cortes-Ramirez, 2015).

In this study, "hegemony" is used only in those cases where the dominated individuals come to believe or internalize the dominant norms as "natural," while "coercion" is used in those cases where individuals submit themselves to the dominant norms not because they want to but because they have no alternative due to structural reasons. Thus, audism, which is accepted and normalized, is considered as "hegemony," while the economic forces acting upon the fishermen are considered as "economic coercion."

Previous studies on CODA 2021 have mainly focused on three areas First, several scholars examine family communication and identity negotiation between

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Deaf and hearing people (Casey, 2023; Guan, 2023). Second, linguistic studies analyze pragmatic features, particularly impoliteness strategies in the film's dialogue (Fatmawati et al., 2024). Third, disability scholars investigate the representation of Deaf identity through concepts such as normalization and disability discourse (Sukul et al., 2025). Previous have analyzed communication, identity, and disability representation in CODA. However, no study has comprehensively examined how audism an economic domination function simultaneously as forms of Gramscian cultural hegemony.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the object of study being the film CODA (2021) by Sian Heder. Descriptive research primarily focuses on describing characteristics of the research sample. Qualitative descriptive studies provide a rich, straightforward description of experiences, perceptions, or events using language derived from the collected data (Neergaard et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2017). According to Creswell and Poth (2018) some important features that make up qualitative research include carrying out research in a natural environment, the researcher being the primary tool for data gathering, utilization of various sources of data, use of both inductive and deductive reasoning, emphasis on meanings held by participants, and development of a holistic explanation of the phenomenon being investigated. This method involves a thorough examination and interpretation of the film's content, which include dialog, visual scenes and themes to identify patterns, recurring motifs, and underlying messages in the film.

The analysis used thematic analysis (TA) for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The study follows the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure a systematic and in-depth interpretation of the data. Data collection began with repeated viewing of the film, during which scenes depicting interactions between the Rossi family, and the economic structures of the fishing industry were noted. From these, seven scenes were selected purposively as particularly illustrative instances of cultural exclusion, economic pressure, and resistance. The selection was guided by relevance to the study's focus rather than by an attempt to catalogue every relevant moment; the seven scenes are therefore illustrative cases, not an exhaustive inventory of domination and resistance in the film.

The selected scenes and their dialogue were documented for analysis and

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coded, and the codes were organized into four themes. Gramsci's concepts then informed interpretation: scenes in which characters accept or internalize dominant values were interpreted as hegemony, while scenes in which compliance results from structural constraint were interpreted as coercion.

Table 1 summarizes this process. A limitation of this approach is that the study did not systematically analyze counter-examples, such as scenes in which hearing characters act supportively, so the findings should be read as an interpretation of illustrative scenes rather than a comprehensive account of the film.

Scene	Initial codes	Theme	Gramscian concept
Picture 1: "freak" insult in the bar	ridicule of sign language; bystander silence	Audistic Cultural Hegemony	consent, common sense
Picture 2: Frank's pessimism	belief that Deaf people cannot succeed	Audistic Cultural Hegemony	internalized common sense
Picture 3: Leo and Ruby	rejection of "helpless"; burden of adaptation reversed	Audistic Cultural Hegemony	counter-hegemonic consciousness
Picture 4: city hall meeting	$800 observer fee; regulatory pressure	Economic Coercion and Domination	coercion
Picture 5: $2.75 vs $3	price disparity; routine transaction	Economic Coercion and Domination	coercion
Picture 6: co-op proposal and protest	collective grievance; direct selling; interpreting for the group	Economic Agency	organic intellectual (Frank and Leo; Ruby as mediator); incipient counter-hegemony
Picture 7: Ruby's audition	sign language as artistic medium;	Reconfiguring Hearing-	resistance

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	family's response	Centered Cultural Space	

The data were coded and categorized into broader themes: (1) Audistic Cultural Hegemony, (2) Economic Coercion and Domination, (3) Economic Agency as a Form of Social Resistance, and (4) Reconfiguring Hearing-Centered Cultural Spase. These themes were subsequently reviewed, defined, and interpreted through Gramsci's theoretical framework. After data were interpreted, the researcher found and drew the conclusions.

Discussion

Audistic Cultural Hegemony

Cultural hegemony, as theorized by Gramsci, describes the process by which a dominant group's worldview becomes accepted as natural, neutral, and unquestionable "common sense," rather than being recognized as one ideology among others. In CODA (2021), this hegemony process operates through audism, whereby hearing ways of being, including spoken language, hearing culture, and hearing-centered norms, are constructed as legitimate social standards while Deaf ways of being are marginalized. Thus, audism functions as the ideological content of cultural hegemony in the film.

The following scenes demonstrate how this audistic cultural hegemony operates as naturalized system that shapes both the treatment of Deaf individuals and their perceptions of themselves.



Picture 1. Representation of audist attitudes and social exclusion toward the Deaf character (Leo) by an audist fisherman (Heder, 2021)

In picture 1, a confrontation breaks out between Leo and another fisherman in a crowded and chaotic bar near the jetty after the fisherman accidentally spills his drink onto Leo. Instead of apologising, the fisherman responds to Leo's complaint by shouting, "Get out my face, freak!" (Heder, 2021, 00:36:47). Another fisherman then stepped in to stop the confrontation, whilst the other fishermen simply stood around and watched the incident unfold without intervening. Although the physical confrontation was

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successfully halted, the insult directed at Leo for using sign language still demonstrates a demeaning attitude towards Deaf people that is accepted within that community.

This situation is significant in demonstrating how hegemony operates through the acceptance and normalisation of the dominant group's values. According to Gramsci (1971) hegemony is maintained not only through coercion, but also through consent, when the dominant group's worldview is accepted as the norm or "common sense". In this scene, the demeaning treatment of Leo met with no objection from the fishermen who witnessed the incident. Their silence and indifference indicate that the insult directed at the Deaf person has been normalised within that social environment. Thus, hegemony is evident not only through the actions of the individual who insulted Leo, but also through the passive acceptance of those around him, which allows such discriminatory practices to continue.



Picture 2. Leo shared his idea of starting an independent family business with his father (Heder, 2021)

Picture 2 shows Leo suggesting that his family start their own business selling fish to free themselves from their dependence on the Salgado Seafood Company. However, Frank responds with an expressive gesture, signalling his refusal: "who will support us? We are the Deaf guys! They see us as fools!" (Heder, 2021, 01:20:39). The significance of Frank's reaction goes beyond simply reflecting a negative attitude toward the project in that it reflects the way in which prejudice toward Deaf individuals has affected his perspective on the economic potential of his family. It is not a concern for the possible problems of starting a business; rather, he views being Deaf as an impediment to success in and of itself. The gesturing and emotive reaction on his part clearly indicate that his response is not simply a rational reaction but a reaction born out of his lived experience in a world that disrespects the abilities of Deaf individuals.

According to Gramsci, hegemony is most effective when the dominant

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ideas are no longer a domination from the outside, but are taken for granted as natural facts beyond doubt. Frank's pessimism is thus the result of the internalization of audistic ideology, in that he views society's prejudice as an objective reality, rather than as a socially constructed form of domination. This scene shows that audist hegemony operates not only in communication and identity, but in the way subordinate groups perceive their own economic capabilities and their willingness to challenge inequitable social relations.



Picture 3. Family argument between Leo and Ruby (Heder, 2021)

Picture 3 depicts a conversation between Ruby and Leo about Ruby's desire to pursue a musical education. Although Ruby has an opportunity to pursue a career in music, she feels unable to leave her family because her parents depend on her as an interpreter when communicating with the hearing community. Leo understands her situation and tells her, "You can't fish full time... You can't stay here. They keep looking to you for everything" (Heder, 2021, 1:20:00). When Ruby responds, "What else am I supposed to do? ... It all involves talking to hearing people," Leo rejects the assumption that their difficulty communicating with the hearing community makes them incapable of running the business themselves. He then states, "So what? Who cares? ... Let them figure out how to deal with Deaf people. We're not helpless" (Heder, 2021, 1:20:33).

From Gramsci's perspective (1971), Leo's response reflects the emergence of a counter-hegemonic consciousness, as he begins to question the dominant assumptions that were previously accepted as a matter of course. Whilst Frank in picture 2 internalises the belief that being Deaf is an obstacle to economic success, Leo rejects this assumption by asserting that his family is 'not helpless'. Rather than viewing dependence on the hearing community as an unchangeable condition, Leo reverses this relationship by demanding that the hearing community also learn to adapt to Deaf people. Thus, this scene marks a shift from the internalisation of hegemony towards counter-hegemonic consciousness. Leo begins to see that the obstacles faced by his family do not stem solely from their incapacity as Deaf people, but also from a

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social environment built upon the norms of the hearing community.

These scenes help us understand that domination audistically occurs not only through discrimination but also through the construction of hearing as the dominant societal norm. It affects everyday interactions, is adopted by the Deaf, and restricts their participation socially and economically. Rejection of these stereotypes marks the emergence of counter-hegemonic consciousness, where Deaf characters begin to resist the norms that render them incompetent or dependent.

Economic Coercion and Domination

Although the previous section demonstrates how audism operates as cultural hegemony, CODA also illustrates how domination operates through economic structures. Within the film, the subordinates not only the Deaf Rossi family but also the broader community of fishermen in Gloucester, who occupy a structurally disadvantaged position within the fishing industry.



Picture 4. The city hall meeting scene depicting the confrontation between local fishermen and fishery regulators in CODA (Heder, 2021)

Economic domination is illustrated through Salgado Seafood Company, a dominant seafood processor and buyer in the local fishing economy. As the dominant capitalist actor within the local fishing economy, Salgado occupies a position that allows it to control the terms of exchange without directly participating in the labor of fishing itself. Because fishermen have limited alternatives for selling their catch, Salgado possesses considerable power to determine prices, reducing their bargaining power and reinforcing their economic dependence on the company. This unequal relationship becomes particularly visible when fishermen are required to bear the cost of hiring field observers at $800 per day under the justification of protecting the fishery. As stated in the film, “We understand that the observers are a financial hardship, but it’s critical to protect the fishery.”(Heder, 2021, 00:49:34)

These regulatory requirements demonstrate how coercive economic

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pressures operate within the fishing community. Although the observer requirement is presented as a conservation measure, its financial burden is imposed directly on the fishermen, who have limited ability to reject the policy without jeopardizing their livelihoods. Within a Gramscian framework, economic hegemony operates through the interaction of coercion and consent, whereby subordinated groups may come to accept structural pressures as unavoidable conditions of work (Thompson & Nies, 2026). In this context, the fishermen's continued compliance does not necessarily indicate genuine agreement with these conditions, but rather reflects the limited economic alternatives available to them.

This structural vulnerability is consistent with the political-economic analysis of fisheries presented by Campling, Havice and McCall Howard (2012) which shows that the fishing industry is characterized by various strategies of capital accumulation as well as varying levels of market concentration and control (Campling et al., 2012). In the case of Gloucester, substantial control over the local fishing commodity chain is concentrated in processing and trading companies such as Salgado. This political-economic perspective reveals that although household producers and small-scale fishermen appear to engage in the same production activities at sea, production relations are in fact tightly controlled by dominant capitalist interests. Consequently, because local fishermen have no control over either the processing or trading sectors within the fisheries commodity chain, they are compelled to accept the prices offered by Salgado and the costly policy of deploying government observers as conditions for continuing to operate.



Picture 5. Ruby confronts the buyer after discovering that Leo is offered $2.75 while McKinney receives $3 for his catch (Heder, 2021)

This growing vulnerability is explicitly depicted in a scene at the fish market, when Leo tries to sell his catch. The buyer, standing with a clipboard and more focused on recording the transaction than interacting directly with the family, offers a price without negotiation. When Ruby then approaches

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and asks, “What are you giving him?”, the buyer replies, “$2.75”. Ruby immediately realises the disparity and responds, “I just heard Tony tell McKinney it was $3” (Heder, 2021, 00:26:00). The film does not state why Leo is offered a lower price, so the disparity should be read with caution. It is consistent with Salgado’s general power to set prices unilaterally, which affects all fishermen; it may also suggest that the buyer expects less resistance from a Deaf seller, but this second reading is an interpretation rather than something the scene establishes. What the scene does show is that the disparity goes unnoticed until Ruby questions it.

Beyond unequal market relations, the vulnerability of Gloucester's fishermen is intensified by the absence of fisheries governance that prioritizes their rights and well-being. As argued by Allison et al. (2012) and Charles (2011), current fisheries governance often neglects the human aspects of small-scale fishermen’s lives, even though the adoption of a “human rights-based approach” is crucial for compelling the government to address issues of income poverty, food insecurity, marginalization, occupational risks, and poor access to education and health care (see in Davis & Ruddle, 2012). In CODA, the absence of a human rights-based framework led the fisheries board to impose an $800 observer fee without considering its impact on the economic stability of local fishermen, particularly the Rossi family, who experience compounded vulnerability as Deaf workers within the fishing industry.

The marginalization of the Rossi family is shaped by both class position and Deafness, but the film supports these two sources of disadvantage to different degrees. Disadvantages attributable to class are those shared with the hearing fishermen: dependence on Salgado’s pricing and the $800 observer fee. Disadvantages attributable to audism are those the film shows explicitly: the insult directed at Leo’s sign language (Picture 1), Frank’s belief that Deaf people cannot succeed economically (Picture 2), and the family’s reliance on Ruby to interpret in dealings with the hearing world (Picture 3). The price disparity in Picture 5 lies between these categories: it may reflect Salgado’s general pricing practice or an additional exploitation of the family’s Deafness, and the film does not settle which. The two processes do reinforce each other in a way the film supports: Frank’s internalized belief that “they see us as fools” discourages the family from seeking alternatives to Salgado, which prolongs the class-based dependence that the monopoly produces. Distinguishing the sources of disadvantage in this way avoids attributing every instance of unequal treatment to audism.

Market concentration, price discrimination, and high regulatory costs

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are interconnected and strengthen the existing economic hegemony in Gloucester. These factors make it almost impossible for fishermen to challenge the existing economic order, as they are forced to submit to it to survive economically. Nevertheless, their consent is not absolute. When fishermen see how difficult it is for them to live under economic pressure, they begin to understand that their problems are shared with other fishermen. This shared understanding creates a basis for them to question the existing economic order and collectively challenge the conditions that keep them in a subordinate position.

Economic Agency as Form of Social Resistance

The lack of a human rights-based approach to fisheries governance, exemplified by the imposition of the $800 observer fee and the inequity of the pricing system under Salgado's control, moves the fishermen from passive consent to active resistance. Gramsci (1971) argues that consent is not a fixed or permanent condition, but one that can erode once the material costs of domination become too visible or burdensome to bear silently. As the economic pressures on Gloucester's fishermen accumulate (rising quotas, costly observer fees, and unequal pricing), this recognition of shared grievance marks the beginning of a shift from coerced submission toward organized collective resistance.



Picture 6. Deaf family resistance will manage their own fish business and invite another fisherman to join them (Heder, 2021)

In this chaotic situation, Leo and Frank played key roles in turning collective frustration into organized resistance. They proposed a different economic approach, setting up a separate fish-selling enterprise and asking other fishermen to collaborate. Leo states, "We're gonna sell our own fish, any of you wanna join us? Bring us your catch and we'll double your present earnings." (Heder, 2021, 51:24). This proposal is significant not simply because it offers a new source of income, but because it directly attacks the

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mechanism of dependence discussed in the previous section: by selling directly to other buyers and bypassing Salgado's monopoly altogether, Leo's plan removes the very condition lack of an alternative buyer that had allowed Salgado to dictate prices unilaterally. Rather than asking for better treatment within the existing system, the Rossi family's goal is to rebuild the underlying economic relations themselves, replacing dependence on a single monopolistic buyer with a cooperative model based on collective ownership and mutual support.

The Rossi family's initiative is an example of the structural inequalities often present in small-scale fisheries. Davis and Ruddle (2012), describe how small-scale fishing communities are caught in an exploitative port market system in which fishermen are price takers while buyers and processors act as price givers, due to the perishable nature of the fish. This dynamic establishes an unequal patron–client relationship, in which dominant buyers or companies control market access, forcing fishermen into a position of economic dependence. In the context of CODA, this unequal dynamic is enforced by Salgado, who dictates market prices. The Rossi family attempts to take back control over the production and distribution of their catch by circumventing Salgado and selling their catch directly, thereby challenging this unequal market structure.

Economic crises often cause divisions in fishing communities. Howard (2012, as cited in Campling et al., 2012), notes that traditional fishermen's organizations often represent the interests of large vessel owners, creating internal divisions and hindering collective resistance. The Rossi family, however, responds by forming the *Fresh Catch Fishermen Co-op* and inviting other fishermen to join the collective. This initiative reflects what Gelcich et al. (2006, as cited in Davis & Ruddle, 2012) describe as institution-building at the local level, which provides an essential foundation for effective co-management by building local capacity and fostering inclusive cooperation. Thus, the cooperative functions not only as an economic organization but also as a mechanism for rebuilding solidarity.

From a Gramscian perspective, the Fresh Catch Fishermen Co-op should be read at two levels. At the economic level, it is clearly an exercise of agency: by owning the means of distribution collectively, the Rossi family reduces its dependence on Salgado (Las Heras, 2019). Economic autonomy alone, however, is not automatically counter-hegemonic, since a cooperative could reduce dependence on a monopolistic buyer without challenging the assumptions that sustain subordination. The co-op can be considered counter-

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hegemonic only insofar as it also challenges dominant assumptions and establishes alternative social relations. The film offers partial evidence of this. First, the invitation extended to other fishermen ("any of you wanna join us?") proposes relations of mutual support across the Deaf–hearing divide in place of dependence on a single buyer. Second, Leo's later rejection of the idea that Deaf people must adapt to the hearing world ("We're not helpless," Picture 3) shows that the co-op is accompanied by a challenge to the very assumption Frank treats as fact in Picture 2. The film does not, however, show whether these changes extend beyond the Rossi family, for example whether Salgado, the regulators, or the wider community revise their views of Deaf fishermen. The co-op is therefore best understood as an incipient counter-hegemonic initiative: a clear instance of economic agency, with early signs of ideological change that remain limited in scope.

The transformation described above is carried by several figures rather than a single one. In Gramscian terms, organic intellectuals emerge from a social group and perform three kinds of work: they articulate the group's collective interests, help develop its consciousness of its own position, and contribute to its organization (Gramsci, 1971, p. 5; Sardar 2024). In CODA, these functions are distributed among Frank, Leo, and Ruby, and the city hall meeting shows how they operate together.

Before Frank speaks, the room is already charged with collective frustration, as fishermen accuse regulators of steadily raising quotas and dismiss the observer program as a "snitch" system. Within this context, Frank, through Ruby's interpretation, voices his frustration: "we're tired of this shit, Gio" (Heder, 2021, 00:50:30). This statement is met with an affirming "yeah" from the fishermen, while his subsequent statement that "no one's getting paid what their catch is worth" and "I'm gonna fight like hell to stay out on the water" (Heder, 2021, 00:50:43) is met with applause.

Frank and Leo carry out the most direct organizing work. Frank articulates a grievance the room already shares and gives it a collective claim about unfair pay. Leo then turns that grievance into a proposal for action: selling directly and inviting other fishermen to join (Heder, 2021, 00:51:24), an idea that develops into the Fresh Catch Fishermen Co-op. Because both belong to the fishing community and to the Deaf community, their activity fits the Gramscian model of intellectuals arising from within the group.

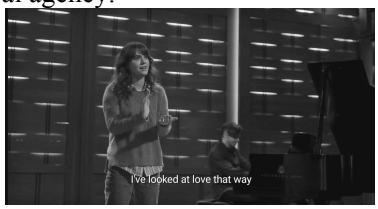
Ruby role is unique; being a hearing person in a Deaf family, Ruby occupies the liminal space in-between, meaning that she is neither entirely "organic" to any of the spaces. Her role goes beyond mere translation in at

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least one respect – the complaints put forward by Frank and Leo can only be communicated to other fishermen via Ruby. This means that she passes on her family's demands, which become a common cause for the fishing community. As portrayed in the film, Ruby is not the one who formulates the collective demands; instead, she communicates the aspiration of her father and brother. Thus, it makes more sense to see Ruby as the intermediary facilitating the work of the "organic intellectuals" Frank and Leo, allowing it to influence the wider fishing community rather than seeing her as the organic intellectual herself. The film shows this extension only within the fishing community.

Reconfiguring Hearing-Centered Cultural Space

Public spaces depicted in the film are usually built under what can be analyzed as audistic hegemony, which reflects the norms of the hearing majority, such as focusing on spoken language and limiting Deaf individuals' participation. Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony helps explain why such spaces appear neutral rather than exclusionary: because hearing norms have become naturalized as the default condition for participation, spaces such as the concert stage are rarely questioned as sites of exclusion until someone actively contests them. Rather than accept this subordinate position, the Rossi family continually negotiate their position within these spaces, showing how hegemonic environments can be reconfigured through inclusion, mutual recognition, and cultural agency.



Picture 7. Negotiating dual worlds: Ruby bridges her hearing and Deaf identities in an exclusive musical space (Heder, 2021)

Ruby's audition is the most obvious example of spatial negotiation in CODA. The musical stage has historically functioned within the narrative as a hearing-centered space, in which vocal performance is the dominant form of artistic expression and Deaf audiences are excluded from full participation. But Ruby subverts this conventional arrangement by singing and interpreting Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides, Now" in American Sign Language at the same time (Heder, 2021, 01:38:10). Within this cinematic context, sign language

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becomes a legitimate artistic medium in its own right rather than a performance technique, allowing Deaf and hearing audiences to experience the performance together. In this way, Ruby interrogates the idea that music belongs only to the hearing community, and reconceives the stage as an inclusive cultural site.

This transformation is also heightened visually through the film's parallel presentation of Ruby's performance and her family's emotional response. The camera cuts between Ruby singing to the hearing audience and close shots of Frank, Jackie, and Leo watching from their seats unable to hear the song, yet visibly moved as they read its meaning through Ruby's signed interpretation. This editing choice is significant in itself: by placing Ruby's voice and her family's silence within the same visual sequence, the film refuses to privilege one mode of experiencing the performance over the other, positioning hearing and watching-through-sign as equally valid ways of accessing the same artistic moment. The CODA performance brings together Deaf and hearing experiences, challenging the traditional hierarchy that privileges hearing as the only legitimate mode of engaging with music. Rather than demanding the Deaf community conform to hearing culture, the film shows that public spaces can be rebuilt to make room for various ways of communicating and expressing culture.

This process of negotiation is not limited to the artistic realm. Read alongside the formation of the Fresh Catch Fishermen Co-op discussed in the previous section, Ruby's audition reveals a broader pattern: in both the concert hall and the fish market, the Rossi family does not simply request access to a hearing-dominated space, but actively restructures the terms on which that space operates whether by making sign language a legitimate mode of artistic participation, or by building an alternative economic structure outside Salgado's control. In artistic as well as economic terms, the Deaf community is no longer an object of the norms of the dominant culture, but an active agent capable of reconfiguring the social spaces it inhabits.

The negotiations in CODA show that resistance to audistic hegemony is not just resistance to exclusion, but the conversion of hegemonic sites into sites of inclusion and mutual recognition. Instead of erasing the divide between Deaf and hearing identities, the film imagines a world where the two communities can live as equals side by side. Therefore, the Rossi family's capacity to inhabit artistic and economic spaces is not only resistance to audism, but also a redefinition of social space as a shared arena where Deaf identity is viewed as equally legitimate within public life.

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Conclusion

This study set out to examine how cultural and economic hegemony operate in CODA (2021) through a Gramscian framework, and how the Rossi family's experiences illustrate both the mechanisms of domination and the possibilities of resistance available to marginalized communities. The findings show that audism functions as the specific ideological content of cultural hegemony in the film, normalizing hearing communication as common sense while marginalizing Deaf ways of being. This cultural domination is compounded by economic domination, as the Salgado Seafood Company's market monopoly reproduces unequal relations that limit the fishermen's autonomy relations made even more unequal for the Rossi family by the intersection of audism and class subordination. At the same time, the film demonstrates that hegemony is neither fixed nor uncontested: through the formation of the Fresh Catch Fishermen Co-op, the Rossi family asserts economic autonomy through collective ownership, while the organic intellectual activity of Frank and Leo, mediated by Ruby's interpreting, shows how marginalized communities can translate individual grievance into collective consciousness and organized resistance.

Beyond its contribution to Gramscian film analysis, this study also extends understanding within Deaf Studies by illustrating how Deaf agency can be enacted not only through individual acts of self-assertion, but through the deliberate reconfiguration of economic and cultural spaces historically structured around hearing norms. CODA ultimately portrays Deaf resistance as a pursuit of agency, recognition, and equitable access to both cultural and economic life, demonstrating that structures of domination, however deeply naturalized or materially enforced, can be confronted and begin to be reconfigured through collective action and the creation of alternative spaces.

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