Stereotyping Javanese Workers: An Analysis of Domestic Worker Representation in Movies

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ABSTRACT

Media representations of Javanese domestic servants, especially in the Indonesian film industry, have been characterized by persistent stereotypes. Historically, Javanese laborers have been depicted as loyal, weak, and submissive, reinforcing cultural assumptions about their roles in urban households. This study examines the portrayal of Javanese domestic workers in Indonesian films, emphasizing how these stereotypes reflect broader cultural perspectives on class, ethnicity, and rural-to-urban migration. Using a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative content analysis of five popular Indonesian films with quantitative audience reception surveys and interviews, the research explores both the encoded media messages and how diverse viewers decode them. Findings reveal that films commonly encode Javanese domestic workers as polite, diligent, humble, and submissive, often using cultural markers such as traditional attire and dialects to reinforce these images. However, audience responses vary significantly: about 19% of viewers accept these portrayals uncritically (dominant-hegemonic decoding), 81% engage with them critically, partially accepting but also questioning their relevance and accuracy (negotiated decoding), and 38.1% actively reject the stereotypes, criticizing their role in perpetuating discrimination and calling for more diverse and empowering representations (oppositional decoding). This study highlights the complexity of media reception and underscores the influential role of films in shaping societal perceptions of ethnic minorities, particularly domestic workers. It calls for filmmakers to move beyond reductive stereotypes and to present more nuanced and inclusive narratives that reflect the evolving realities and aspirations of Javanese communities.

INTRODUCTION

In modern democratic countries, everyone agrees that the media plays a big part in shaping public opinion and the way people talk about politics. Television and the internet are very important for spreading knowledge and shaping political stories in Indonesia. (Wlezien and Soroka, 2023), explores the reciprocal relationship between media coverage, public preferences, and policy decisions, suggesting that media not only reflect public opinion but also influence policy changes, particularly in budgetary decisions. To frame something means to pick out certain parts of reality and make them stand out more in a text that is meant to communicate.

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Media plays a crucial role in shaping societal perceptions, especially through its portrayal of different groups and communities. Films, as a form of mass media, often become a mirror of societal norms, values, and stereotypes. Stuart Hall notes that media does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs it through the process of encoding and decoding messages. This understanding highlights the importance of critically analyzing media portrayals to uncover underlying social messages and stereotypes.

Javanese people, though the largest ethnic group in Indonesia, often find themselves depicted as a minority in urban contexts, particularly in the capital city of Jakarta, where they are disproportionately represented as domestic workers (Hofte & Meel, 2018). The migration of Javanese individuals from rural to urban areas for labor has been a long-standing phenomenon, with many entering domestic service due to economic necessity. As highlighted by Pérez (2017), "Migrant domestic workers face numerous challenges, including precarious employment conditions, exploitation, and limited legal protections. Many of these workers, predominantly women, migrate from the Global South to wealthier countries seeking better opportunities, yet they often encounter significant obstacles, such as low wages, long working hours, and the risk of abuse. The demand for their labor persists because they fill essential caregiving and household roles, especially in countries with aging populations. This framing perpetuates stereotypes that these individuals are suited to such roles due to their cultural background, reinforcing a dichotomy between urban elites and rural laborers.

To analyze how these portrayals are constructed and received, this article employs Stuart Hall's Encoding-Decoding theory. Bødker (2016) explores how the encoding/decoding framework applies to the circulation of journalism in the digital age. He notes that Hall's idea of "circulation" not only reflects media's technological transmission but also the hermeneutical processes through which meaning and ideology shift, particularly with the rise of participatory digital platforms. Hall (1980) outlines three possible readings of media texts: the dominant (or preferred) reading, where the audience accepts the intended message; the negotiated reading, where the audience partially accepts the message but with some reservations; and the oppositional reading, where the audience rejects the encoded meaning and interprets the message based on their own context. This theory allows for a nuanced understanding of how different viewers might interpret the stereotypical portrayals of Javanese domestic workers in films.

There are some studies that discuss about Javanese women identity and representation, such as Maulana's (2025) ethnographic study on the negotiation of Javanese women's roles in domestic and public spheres, Arya and Sokowati's (2024) semiotic analysis of Javanese portrayals in colonial-themed cinema, Budiana's (2024) examination of gender stereotypes in Indonesian popular films, and Widodo's *et al* (2023) the modern Javanese nuclear family film *Mudik*. There remains a significant gap in understanding how Javanese domestic workers are specifically represented in contemporary Indonesian films and how these portrayals influence audience perceptions. Existing studies tend to focus on broader gender roles, colonial narratives, or social media's impact on discourse, but few critically investigate the intersection of ethnicity, class, and migration as encoded in film portrayals of Javanese domestic workers. Furthermore, there is limited research employing Stuart

Hall's encoding-decoding framework to analyze both the media texts and the audience's active reception in this context. This study addresses these gaps by focusing explicitly on the stereotyping of Javanese domestic workers in Indonesian cinema and by incorporating a mixed-methods approach that captures both media encoding and audience decoding processes.

This novelty of this study is by applying Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model to dichotomize the layered meanings surrounded in Indonesian films about Javanese domestic workers. This study foregrounds the role of cultural markers such as traditional attire and language in encoding ethnic identity, while simultaneously exposing the potential harm of reductive stereotypes in disseminating social hierarchies and discrimination. By analyzing both the encoded messages within films and the varied ways audiences decode them, the research aims to discover how media shapes societal perceptions of Javanese people, particularly in urban contexts like Jakarta where ethnic and class distinctions are pronounced. The study also tries to find to ongoing conversations about ethnic minority representation and domestic labor in media, advocating for more balanced and empowering portrayals. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of audience engagement in interpreting media texts, suggesting that media literacy and critical consumption can challenge rigid stereotypes and promote social equity.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research to explore the portrayal of Javanese domestic workers in popular Indonesian films. Respondents were asked to watch five popular Indonesian films: Awas Ada Sule (2009), Mukidi (2016), Manusia Setengah Salmon (2013), Cek Toko Sebelah (2016), and Keluarga Cemara (2019), serve as media representations that might influence audience perceptions of Javanese workers. The study is conducted using a two-part methodology: content analysis and audience reception research, with a sample of 40 participants of Jakarta peoples.

The qualitative portion of this study focuses on content analysis of the five films. Content analysis is widely used in media studies to examine how certain themes or stereotypes are portrayed in popular culture. Following methods described by Krippendorff (2018), We will examine how Javanese domestic workers are portrayed in each movie, focusing on important topics like work ethic, subservience, or cultural indicators (such language, dress, and mannerisms) connected to Javanese identity. Based on recurrent representations of Javanese workers as either submissive, diligent, or exhibiting certain cultural traits, the study will classify the portrayals of each movie as either supporting or challenging prevalent preconceptions. The coding framework will adhere to Hall's (1997) encoding/decoding approach in order to comprehend how the filmmakers embed (encode) preconceptions and how viewers are supposed to decode them.

To complement the qualitative analysis, a quantitative survey will be distributed to 40 audience members from Jakarta. The participants, chosen to reflect diverse demographics in terms of age, gender, and occupation, will watch the selected films and then answer a series

of structured questions. The survey will be designed to measure their perceptions of Javanese workers after viewing these films, exploring how strongly the media portrayal of domestic workers influences their perceptions. The questionnaire will include Likert-scale questions on whether the participants believe the movies reinforce or challenge stereotypes of Javanese workers, such as, "To what extent do you agree that the portrayal of domestic workers in Cek Toko Sebelah reflects real-life stereotypes of Javanese people?" Quantitative data collected will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in audience perception. The results will then be cross-referenced with the qualitative findings to identify any correlation between film content and audience reception.

This research examines the degree to which viewers actively interpret or reject the films' encoded meanings, drawing on Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding approach. According to this paradigm, which has been applied by scholars such as Morley (2006), viewers may interpret these depictions differently if they add their own cultural backgrounds and experiences to the viewing experience. Thus, in order to investigate whether viewers accept, contest, or reinterpret the films' depiction of Javanese workers, audience reactions will be grouped according to Hall's framework of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional interpretations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section analyzes the quantitative and qualitative data collected to uncover the encoded messages about Javanese domestic workers (ART) in Indonesian films and how audiences decode these representations. Bhadra & Signh (2022) said that "Media similarly engage us in our recreation time and gives a relief from our regular timetables. The approach of new media with reasonable and philosophical changes of conventional media has affected social change and hence changed the world correspondence scene". The findings are structured using Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model and provide a comprehensive analysis of the audience's responses, categorized into dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings.

Encoding Javanese ART Representations in Films

The portrayal of Javanese ARTs in Indonesian films is encoded through stories that emphasize traditional values like work, humility, and servitude. Although these portrayals conform to societal standards, they frequently exaggerate characteristics for dramatic or humorous effect. For example, a stereotype of domestic workers is reinforced by their frequent portrayal as loving but naive individuals.

The encoded messages seek to strengthen cultural values connected to Javanese identity and to create empathy. But by reducing people to stereotypes, these representations run the risk of maintaining a limited perspective on their social responsibilities and contributions. When filmmakers include particular meanings into their stories, this is known as encoding. Javanese ARTs with qualities consistent with idealized cultural norms are frequently portrayed in Indonesian films. Characters, for example, are usually portrayed as courteous and diligent, meeting conventional standards of subservience. The purpose of these representations is to arouse familiarity and uphold social hierarchies.

By combining Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model with a mixed-methods approach, this study deciphers how audiences interpret media representations of Javanese domestic workers (ART) in Indonesian films. The encoding-decoding model is central to

understanding the interplay between media producers' intentions (encoding) and audience interpretations (decoding), revealing both alignment and divergence in meanings. We integrate quantitative survey data with qualitative thematic insights to explore this phenomenon comprehensively.

Media Encoding: The Construction of Representations

The conscious formation of cultural, ideological, and narrative components into cinematic representations is known as media encoding. Javanese ARTs are frequently shown in Indonesian films as courteous, industrious, and obedient, which is consistent with the standards of society regarding slavery. These representations are supported by linguistic, behavioral, and visual cues intended to arouse audience familiarity and cultural resonance.

For example, traditional clothing like kebaya or batik is commonly used to portray Javanese domestic workers, highlighting their modesty and cultural authenticity. The employment of Javanese titles and dialects, among other linguistic indicators, serves to further transform their regional identity and lower social standing. The filmmakers' attempt to convey a culturally relevant image that supports the prevailing societal beliefs about domestic work is reflected in these depictions.

Quantitative data from the survey indicated that 38.1% of respondents recognized and aligned with these positive attributes, describing Javanese ARTs as "sopan" (polite) and "telaten" (meticulous). This aligns with Hall's dominant-hegemonic encoding, where media messages reinforce existing power dynamics and cultural hierarchies (Hall, 1980). Respondents remarked that these depictions were reflective of cultural values, though they acknowledged the potential for stereotyping.

Cultural and Visual Encoding

Javanese domestic workers are typically encoded with cultural markers that resonate with the audience's familiarity with traditional Javanese values. These markers include:

1. Behavioral Traits: Javanese ARTs are frequently seen as courteous, diligent, and submissive. This fits the social ideal of the "perfect servant" and supports the notion that Javanese people are inherently submissive.
2. Visual Cues: Filmmakers use elements like traditional Javanese attire (e.g., kebaya and batik), modest makeup, and submissive body language to visually encode their characters.
3. Linguistic Representation: The use of Javanese dialects or specific honorifics in dialogue further reinforces cultural authenticity and hierarchy in the narratives.

Javanese domestic workers, for example, are depicted in the movie wearing traditional batik and a formal uniform while they diligently carry out home duties, highlighting their ties to traditional values. Such portrayals align with Hall's concept of dominant-hegemonic encoding, where media messages are constructed to reflect and reinforce societal norms (Hall, 1980).

The Dual Nature of Encoding

Although encoding presents ARTs in an ideal light, it also reinforces reductive notions about Javanese people as being illiterate and submissive. These depictions are consistent with historical accounts that show the rise of Javanese domestic servants as a result of economic

migration from country to urban Java. Their perceived need for their employers is reinforced by the employment of narrative and visual components, such as dependent behavior and limited agency in decision-making. Such representations run the risk of reinforcing the perception that Javanese people are naturally suited for subservient positions.

Equally frequent is the representation of Javanese domestic workers as illiterate and inferior. This contrast highlights the conflict between promoting stereotypes and honoring cultural uniqueness. According to Hall's thesis, the producers' ideas and the sociocultural environment in which they function influence the intentional process of encoding. In this instance, filmmakers convey ideas that appeal to viewers' conventional viewpoints while running the risk of reiterating structural injustices.

However, encoding is not static. Filmmakers subtly embed elements of cultural pride by showcasing the workers' loyalty, dedication, and strong work ethic. These narratives aim to evoke empathy and admiration while maintaining the hierarchical structures inherent in the employer-employee relationship.

Decoding: Audience Interpretations of Media Messages

Decoding, as conceptualized by Hall, involves the audience's active interpretation of encoded messages. "Films are windows into their respective societies of origin. They have the potential to affect or shape foreign audiences' perceptions of the society they represent or brand." (Endong, 2023). Individual socio-cultural backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints impact audiences' decoding rather than their passive acceptance of media portrayals. According to Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model, audiences actively interact with media messages by interpreting them in light of their ideologies, experiences, and sociocultural contexts. Three main stances are involved in the decoding process: oppositional, negotiated, and dominant-hegemonic. Decoding audience reactions to media representations of Javanese domestic workers (ART) in Indonesian films shows a range of reactions, from acceptance to outright rejection. These decoding viewpoints are expanded upon in this part, which provides a thorough examination of their subtleties, complexity, and wider ramifications, see Table 1.

Table 1. *Audience response of the media from google form*

Decoding Position	Description	Percentage	Key Audience Response	Implications
Dominant-Hegemonic	Audiences accept the media's encoded messages fully, viewing the portrayals as natural and	19.0%	- "Orang Jawa terkenal dengan sikap melayani yang tulus" (Javanese people are known for their sincere	Reinforces stereotypes, validates traditional hierarchies, and aligns with media producers' intentions.

Decoding Position	Description	Percentage	Key Audience Response	Implications
	reflective of reality		service-oriented nature).	
Negotiated	Audiences partially accept the encoded messages but adapt them based on personal or contextual understanding.	81.0%	- "Tidak semua orang Jawa menjadi pembantu. Banyak yang sukses di bidang lain" (Not all Javanese are domestic workers; many are successful in other fields).	Reflects societal shifts, acknowledges cultural markers, and critiques outdated stereotypes.
Oppositional	Audiences reject the encoded messages, challenging their validity and socio-political implications.	38.1%	- "Penggambaran ini memperkuat diskriminasi terhadap orang Jawa sebagai pekerja kelas rendah" (These portrayals reinforce discrimination against Javanese people).	Demonstrates audience resistance to media narratives, pushing for equity and authentic representation

Dominant-Hegemonic Decoding: Full Acceptance of Media Portrayals

A subset of respondents (**19.0%**) accepted the media's encoded messages without question, aligning their interpretations with the filmmakers' intended narrative. This dominant-hegemonic decoding position reflects the audience's internalization of cultural and societal norms embedded in the portrayal of Javanese ARTs. Participants in this group frequently described Javanese domestic workers as naturally suited for their roles due to

attributes such as politeness, diligence, and humility. One respondent stated, "*Sikap sopan dan patuh adalah ciri khas orang Jawa, dan itu cocok dengan pekerjaan ART*" (Politeness and obedience are Javanese traits, and they suit domestic work). These responses illustrate how deeply entrenched cultural stereotypes influence audience perceptions.

This acceptance also shows how media representations and the sociohistorical background of Javanese migration for domestic work converge. In this way, dominant-hegemonic decoders validate the encoded messages of filmmakers by considering media representations as true reflections of reality. However, the structural inequalities and stereotypes that limit Javanese people to inferior roles are reinforced by such naive acceptance.

Negotiated Decoding: Partial Acceptance with Critical Engagement

The majority of respondents **(81.0%)** took a negotiated stance, indicating a more sophisticated interaction with the messages expressed in the media. These participants criticized the portrayals' accuracy and applicability in contemporary circumstances while yet partially accepting them.

Critiques of Stereotypes

While acknowledging the historical origins of Javanese domestic work, negotiated decoders frequently questioned the persistence of these stereotypes. "*Saya paham kenapa orang Jawa ditambarkan seperti ini, tapi kenyataannya sekarang berbeda,*" said one reply. There are a lot of Jawa people who are successful in other fields. (I can see why Javanese people are portrayed in this manner, but things have changed since then. Many Javanese achieve success in other domains. Compare it to the limited representations in the media, this critique shows a knowledge of the diversity and agency within Javanese communities.

Contextual Adaptations

Participants of this group modified their ideas to fit their particular social settings and experiences. Some acknowledged, for instance, that younger viewers are likely to view these depictions as irrelevant or out of date, even while they may resonate with older generations. This age gap demonstrates how sociocultural changes impact audience decoding, supporting Hall's claim that both individual and collective knowledge frameworks influence decoding.

Cultural Appreciation vs. Stereotyping

Negotiated decoders often expressed appreciation for the cultural markers used in media representations, such as traditional attire and language, but critiqued their reductionist application. One participant noted, "*Batik dan kebaya itu indah, tapi kenapa harus selalu digunakan untuk menggambarkan orang Jawa sebagai pembantu?*" (Batik and kebaya are beautiful, but why must they always be used to depict Javanese people as domestic workers?). This tension between cultural pride and systemic stereotyping underscores the complexities of negotiated decoding.

Oppositional Decoding: Active Rejection of Media Messages

38.1% of the qualitative responses showed oppositional readings, in which people completely rejected the stereotypes contained in the media. In line with Hall's theory that oppositional decoding is an act of resistance, these people questioned the veracity of the depictions and criticized their sociopolitical ramifications.

Rejection of Systemic Hierarchies

The hierarchical rules ingrained in the representation of Javanese ARTs were regularly rejected by oppositional decoders, who contended that these representations restrict perceptions of Javanese potential and perpetuate societal inequity. According to one

respondent, "*Film-film ini hanya memperkuat pandangan bahwa orang Jawa adalah pekerja kelas bawah, padahal kenyataannya tidak seperti itu*" (These films only reinforce the view that Javanese are lower-class workers, whereas the reality is not like that). This critique reflects a broader societal push for equity and inclusivity in media narratives.

Call for Empowering Narratives

Several diversified and empowered portrayals of Javanese people were also demanded by oppositional decoders. They maintained that the media should go beyond the limited scope of domestic labor and highlight the accomplishments and contributions of Javanese people in a variety of disciplines. One participant proposed, "*Kenapa tidak ada cerita tentang orang Jawa yang menjadi pemimpin atau inovator? Itu juga bagian dari budaya kita*" (Why are there no stories about Javanese people becoming leaders or innovators? That is also part of our culture).

Challenging Cultural Essentialism

The essentialist depiction of Javanese culture as essentially subservient or servile was often criticized in oppositional responses. In addition to misrepresenting the diversity within Javanese groups, these participants believed that these depictions reinforce negative preconceptions that impede social mobility. This opposition is consistent with Hall's theory that oppositional decoding is a kind of ideological and cultural criticism. According to Endong, "Films are windows into their respective societies of origin. They have the potential to affect or shape foreign audiences' perceptions of the society they represent or brand." (Endong,2023)

Discussion

The results of this study reveal a complex and multifaceted portrayal of Javanese domestic workers in Indonesian films, confirming some expectations while also uncovering nuanced audience reactions. The encoding of these characters predominantly aligns with traditional stereotypes, depicting them as polite, diligent, humble, and submissive, which reflects broader cultural narratives about class, ethnicity, and rural-to-urban migration. These portrayals are consistent with historical and societal norms that position Javanese laborers in subordinate domestic roles, reinforcing established social hierarchies. This finding was expected given the deep-rooted cultural assumptions surrounding Javanese domestic workers, as also noted in Arya and Sokowati's (2024) semiotic analysis of Javanese portrayals in colonial cinema, where stereotypical and subordinate roles persist. However, the study's audience reception component revealed more profound insights: while a minority (19%) accepted these portrayals uncritically, the majority engaged with them critically (81%), and a significant portion (38.1%) actively rejected the stereotypes. This diversity of decoding responses highlights the dynamic and contested nature of media interpretation, which was an especially important and somewhat unexpected pattern demonstrating that audiences are not passive consumers but active interpreters influenced by their sociocultural backgrounds.

Comparing these results with previous research, this study extends the understanding of Javanese identity negotiation beyond the domestic-public sphere dynamics explored by Maulana (2025) and the gendered portrayals in Indonesian popular films analyzed by Budiana (2024). While Maulana showed how Javanese women adapt traditional roles in contemporary contexts, our findings reveal that media representations often lag behind these social shifts, continuing to emphasize outdated stereotypes. Similarly, Budiana's work on

gender stereotypes in film aligns with our findings that patriarchal and cultural values heavily shape portrayals, reinforcing dependent and subservient images of women, in this case, Javanese domestic workers. The oppositional decoding observed in our study resonates with critiques from Rahmawati and Nurhadi (2023), who highlighted the marginalization and stereotyping of women within Islamic Javanese culture, demonstrating a broader pattern of resistance against reductive cultural narratives. Furthermore, the call from oppositional decoders for more empowering and diverse representations echoes demands in the literature for media to reflect the complexity and agency of ethnic minorities, moving beyond essentialist portrayals (Arya & Sokowati, 2024; Budiana, 2024).

The other studies discuss about the stereotypical portrayals for Javanese women, Widodo, Priyatna, and Mulyadi's (2023) analysis of gender stereotypes in the film *Mudik* similarly highlights how Indonesian media often reinforce traditional gender roles, showing women in dependent or subordinate positions within family structures. This parallels your finding that media portrayals of Javanese domestic workers tend to uphold cultural hierarchies and stereotypical roles. Julita and Oktarina's (2024) exploration of *Gadis Kretek* reveals how spatial and cultural symbols in film reflect Javanese societal values and identity, emphasizing the importance of cultural markers—such as traditional attire and local customs—which your study also identifies as key elements in encoding Javanese domestic workers' identities. Meanwhile, Anggraeni and Prasetiyo's (2018) study of the novel *Dahuru Ing Loji Kepencil* presents a contrasting depiction of Javanese women as strong and not subordinated, suggesting that literary portrayals can challenge dominant stereotypes, a stance echoed by the oppositional decoders in your research who reject reductive media portrayals and call for more empowered representations. Lastly, Nadya Afdholy et al. (2022) in their analysis of *Sitti Nurbaya* highlight women's migration as an act of resistance against patriarchal and feudal constraints, which complements your findings on audience members' critical engagement with and rejection of traditional stereotypes, advocating for narratives that reflect agency and social mobility.

From these results, several broader deductions can be made. First, media representations play a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing societal perceptions of ethnic minorities, but these portrayals are not fixed or universally accepted. The active negotiation and opposition by audiences suggest that media literacy and critical engagement can challenge harmful stereotypes and promote more equitable narratives. For filmmakers, this implies a responsibility to move beyond simplistic and stereotypical depictions of Javanese domestic workers and to incorporate more nuanced, empowering stories that reflect the evolving realities, aspirations, and diversity within Javanese communities. Such changes could contribute to dismantling structural inequalities and fostering social inclusion. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of considering audience diversity in media production and reception research, as interpretations vary significantly based on viewers' backgrounds and experiences.

Finally, a broader hypothesis arising from this study is that media texts about ethnic minorities in Indonesia—and potentially other multicultural societies—are inherently polysemic, with meanings shaped not only by producers' intentions but also by complex audience negotiations. Future research could test this hypothesis by examining other marginalized groups in Indonesian media or by exploring longitudinal changes in audience decoding as social contexts evolve. Furthermore, investigating how media producers

themselves perceive and respond to audience feedback could provide deeper insights into the cyclical nature of encoding and decoding in contemporary media landscapes.

CONCLUSION

Applying Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding paradigm, the study examines how Javanese domestic workers are portrayed in Indonesian films, examining how media creators create these narratives and how viewers understand them. The study is framed in the introduction by the media's influence on cultural beliefs, including the frequent depictions of domestic workers as courteous, hardworking, and subservient. This emphasis reflects larger cultural dynamics of hierarchy and tradition that are ingrained in the media. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used into the research methodology. Public impressions were measured by a survey, and the decoding process was further illuminated by thematic analysis of responses that were open ended. In order to classify audience interpretations into oppositional, negotiated, and dominant-hegemonic viewpoints, Stuart Hall's theoretical framework was essential. A thorough investigation of the intended media messages as well as the audience's active participation with these portrayals was made possible by this dual approach. The complexity of audience reactions is demonstrated by the findings. The media's presentation of Javanese workers as normal and consistent with traditional norms is accepted by dominant-hegemonic decoders. Negotiated decoders participate critically, acknowledging the historical significance of these depictions while challenging their suitability for contemporary settings. These representations are explicitly rejected by oppositional decoders, who see them as damaging and simplistic stereotypes that uphold structural injustices.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes how media texts are polysemic and how audiences actively participate in their interpretation. Filmmakers' attempts to conform to social norms are reflected in the encoding, but different interpretations that contradict or defy these messages are revealed through decoding. The results call on filmmakers to take into account the changing realities and goals of Javanese communities and highlight the need for more empowered and inclusive representations in the media. The audience reception analysis uncovers a complex spectrum of decoding positions. Dominant-hegemonic decoders (19%) accept these portrayals as natural and reflective of reality, thereby reinforcing existing stereotypes and social inequalities. Negotiated decoders (81%) engage critically with the media messages, recognizing the historical context behind these depictions but questioning their relevance and accuracy in contemporary society. They appreciate cultural elements but challenge the persistence of outdated stereotypes. Oppositional decoders (38.1%) actively reject the encoded meanings, viewing them as harmful simplifications that uphold structural discrimination and limit the social mobility of Javanese people. They call for more diverse and empowering representations that highlight Javanese achievements beyond domestic labor.

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