

Between Cultural Appreciation and Stereotyping: Representation of the Suku Anak Dalam in Trans7's Jejak Petualang

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Abstraction

Media functions not only as a channel for information dissemination but also as a mechanism for constructing representations of social and cultural groups through processes of meaning-making. One of the indigenous communities frequently represented in Indonesian media is the Suku Anak Dalam (SAD), an indigenous group living in the forest areas of Jambi Province. This study aims to analyze the ethnic and cultural representation of the Suku Anak Dalam in the Warisan Hutan SAD episode of Trans7's Jejak Petualang using Stuart Hall's theory of representation. The research employed a qualitative approach with media representation analysis as its method. Data were collected through observation of the program, transcription of narration and dialogues, and visual documentation. The data were analyzed using Hall's reflective, intentional, and constructionist approaches. The findings reveal that Jejak Petualang portrays the Suku Anak Dalam as an indigenous community living harmoniously with nature, possessing strong ecological knowledge, and maintaining ancestral traditions as part of their cultural identity. However, the representation is ambivalent. On the one hand, the program appreciates local culture and indigenous wisdom; on the other hand, it reproduces stereotypes by portraying the community as exotic, traditional, and distinct from modern society. These findings indicate that media representation not only reflects social reality but also constructs meanings that shape public understanding of indigenous cultural identities.

Keywords: Media Representation, Stuart Hall, Suku Anak Dalam, Culture, Jejak Petualang

INTRODUCTION

Television is a mass media that plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of social and cultural realities. Through its visual and narrative power, television serves not only as a means of conveying information but also as a means of constructing social meanings and specific ideologies (McQuail, 2010). The development of modern media demonstrates that television and digital media still have a significant influence in shaping public perceptions of certain social groups through a representational process influenced by dominant cultural values, ideologies, and institutional interests (Couldry, 2019; Orgad, 2012). Therefore, media representations not only reflect social realities but also contribute to shaping society's perspectives on a cultural group.

One television program that consistently highlights Indonesia's cultural diversity is Jejak Petualang, broadcast by Trans7. This documentary program combines elements of adventure, culture, and the environment through an exploration of the lives of local communities in various regions of Indonesia. One episode that attracted public attention was Warisan Hutan SAD, which featured the lives of the Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) in the Bukit Duabelas area of Jambi. The episode was chosen as the research object because it is one of the indigenous-themed programs that received high attention on Trans7's digital channel. The video, uploaded on July 3, 2018, has been viewed more than 3.3 million times and received thousands of responses from viewers, demonstrating the high level of public interest in the lives of indigenous communities in Indonesia.

Beyond this appeal, it is important to examine how media shapes representations of the Suku Anak Dalam. According to Hall (1997), representation is not simply a process of reflecting reality, but rather a process of producing meaning through the language, symbols, and sign systems used by the media. Through the selection of visuals, narratives, camera angles, and editing techniques, media constructs a particular understanding of the group depicted. Representation can generate positive meanings, but it also has the potential to reinforce stereotypes about minority groups. Findings by Fadli and Elviria (2025) indicate that digital media contributes to constructing cultural representations through the use of signs, symbols, and narratives that shape audiences' understanding of the cultural identities depicted.

The Orang Rimba (Inner Tribe) are an indigenous community living in the forested areas of Jambi Province and parts of South Sumatra, particularly around the Bukit Duabelas and Bukit Tigapuluh National Parks (Waintre, 2003; Sardi, 2010). They are known to have a close relationship with the forest as a source of life, cultural space, and social identity. Over time, the Orang Rimba community has been divided into three groups: the Indigenous Orang Rimba, the Transitional Orang Rimba, and the Outer Orang Rimba, demonstrating the dynamics of adaptation to social and environmental change (Muhaimin, 2023).

However, the Suku Anak Dalam currently faces various challenges due to environmental changes and development. Plantation expansion, land clearing, and forest encroachment have reduced the living space of indigenous communities and threatened the survival of their culture. Furthermore, the Suku Anak Dalam community is often perceived as isolated, backward, and primitive due to their close-to-nature lifestyle. This perception is often reinforced by media representations that emphasize the exotic and simple aspects of their lives over the social dynamics, local knowledge, and adaptability of the community.

From a media representation perspective, this condition relates to the symbolic power the media wields in shaping a group's social image. Bourdieu (1991) explains that media has the ability to determine social categories and meanings accepted by the wider community. Hall (1997) also emphasizes that media not only reflects reality but also helps construct it through the representational systems they employ. Therefore, representations of indigenous peoples in the media require critical examination to understand how cultural identities are formed, maintained, or even simplified in the public sphere.

Studies on the Suku Anak Dalam have been conducted in various contexts. Subagia and Hananto (2020) examined the representation of the Suku Anak Dalam through the board game *Orang Rimba: The Forest Keeper* and found a need for re-visualization to more accurately represent the culture. Iman (2020) examined the ideology of alternative education in the film *Sokola Rimba*. These studies demonstrate that the issue of indigenous peoples' representation has been widely explored through film, literature, and educational media. However, research specifically examining the representation of the Suku Anak Dalam in national documentary television programs remains relatively limited.

The study of the representation of indigenous peoples is becoming increasingly important because the images constructed by the media can influence social acceptance, cultural understanding, and recognition of the existence of indigenous communities. Representations that simplify cultural identities have the potential to reinforce stereotypes, while more inclusive representations can encourage respect for cultural diversity and the rights of indigenous peoples. Furthermore, developments in cultural communication studies indicate that the representation of minority groups in audiovisual media is a crucial issue related to diversity, social inclusion, and the construction of cultural identity in contemporary society (Orgad, 2012).

Based on the above description, there is a research gap that still needs to be addressed, namely the limited research on the representation of the Suku Anak Dalam in national documentary television programs. Furthermore, there are not many studies that comprehensively use Stuart Hall's three representational approaches—reflective, intentional, and constructionist—to analyze the representation of indigenous peoples in television media. Therefore, this study offers a new perspective in understanding how television media constructs meanings and images of indigenous peoples through representational practices.

This study aims to analyze the ethnic and cultural representation of the Suku Anak Dalam tribe in the Jejak Petualang program, "Warisan Hutan SAD" episode, using Stuart Hall's reflective, intentional, and constructionist approach. The results are expected to enrich studies of cultural communication and media representation in Indonesia, while also providing practical contributions to the media industry in presenting indigenous peoples in a more just, participatory, and respectful manner, while respecting local cultural diversity.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with media representation analysis. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning, symbols, and construction of ethnic and cultural representations depicted in the media. The research object is the Jejak Petualang episode of Warisan Hutan SAD, which was uploaded to Trans7's official YouTube channel on July 3, 2018.

The research analysis unit consists of scenes, presenter narration, dialogue, and cultural symbols that represent the ethnic identity and culture of the Suku Anak Dalam in Jejak Petualang. The research data consists of audiovisual documentation obtained from three episodes of the broadcast. The focus of the analysis is directed at the second and third episodes because they contain the entire narrative that depicts the life of the Suku Anak Dalam, thus providing a more complete representation. Data collection was carried out through observation of the broadcast, transcription of narrative and dialogue, and documentation in the form of screenshots of scenes relevant to the research focus. All data were then categorized based on the themes of cultural and ethnic representation that appeared in the broadcast.

Data analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the researcher transcribed and reduced the data by selecting scenes, narratives, and symbols related to the representation of the Suku Anak Dalam. Second, the selected data were coded based on the themes of cultural representation, ethnic identity, human relationships with nature, and emerging stereotypes. Third, the data were analyzed using Stuart Hall's theory of representation through three approaches: reflective, intentional, and constructionist. The reflective approach was used to assess the suitability of the representation to the reality of the Suku Anak Dalam's life as depicted in the broadcast. The intentional approach was used to identify meanings constructed through the narrative and the producer's perspective, while the constructionist approach was used to analyze the process of meaning formation through the language, symbols, and visuals used by the media. Fourth, the results of the analysis were interpreted to understand how the media constructs images and meanings about the Suku Anak Dalam in the public sphere.

Data validity was achieved through diligent observation and theoretical triangulation by comparing interpretations using Stuart Hall's representation theory and various previous studies on indigenous communities and media representation. Furthermore, researchers rebroadcast the analyzed episodes to ensure consistency of interpretation and minimize subjectivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the ethnic and cultural representation of the Suku Anak Dalam (SAD) tribe in the Trans7 episode Jejak Petualang (Adventures of the SAD Forest Heritage) using

Stuart Hall's (1997) reflective, intentional, and constructionist approach. The analysis was conducted on the presenter's narrative, visuals, cultural symbols, and scenes depicting the lives of the SAD people in the Bukit Duabelas National Park area, Jambi.

In general, the research results show that *Jejak Petualang* (Adventure Tracks) portrays the Suku Anak Dalam as an indigenous community living in harmony with nature, possessing strong ecological knowledge, and upholding ancestral traditions as part of their cultural identity. However, this representation is not entirely neutral. Through the narrative, visuals, and symbols used, the media also constructs an image of the Suku Anak Dalam as a distinct group from modern society. Thus, the main findings of this study indicate an ambivalent representation, presenting an appreciation for indigenous culture while simultaneously reproducing certain stereotypes about their lives.

Table 1.**Findings of Representation of the Anak Dalam Tribe in the Jejak Petualang Show**

Stuart Hall's Approach	Key Findings
Reflective	Showing the activities of hunting, looking for honey, gathering, and living side by side with the forest as a depiction of SAD life.
Intentional	The producer builds the image of SAD as guardians of the forest and part of Indonesia's cultural heritage.
Constructionist	The narrative, visuals, and music shape the image of SAD as a traditional group, close to nature, and different from modern society.
General Findings	Representation is ambivalent: appreciative of local culture but still producing cultural stereotypes.

Reflective Approach: SAD Life as Cultural Reality

The reflective approach views representation as a media effort to reflect existing realities. In *Jejak Petualang* (Adventure Tracks), various activities of the Indigenous Peoples' Association (SAD) community, such as hunting, honey gathering, gathering forest products, and building shelters, are presented in a relatively natural documentary style. The camera follows the community's activities without much visual intervention, giving the impression that the life depicted reflects the daily lives of indigenous people. For example, at the beginning of the show, the narrator says:

"They live simply in the middle of the Bukit Duabelas forest. Hunting, fishing, and gathering forest products are their means of survival." (*Trans7 Adventure Trail, 2018, 00:01:15*)

This footage demonstrates the production team's efforts to portray the lives of the SAD community as they truly are. The camera follows their activities in a documentary style, showing traditional skills such as trapping wild boar, collecting honey, and making fire from dry twigs.

These findings indicate that the media strives to present the reality of Indigenous Peoples' lives as a society closely connected to nature. Hunting, gathering, and utilizing forest products are presented not only as economic activities but also as cultural practices passed down through generations. This representation demonstrates that forests are not simply living spaces but also part of the Indigenous Peoples' social and cultural identity. This is in line with research by Iman (2020), which shows that the representation of indigenous peoples in the film *Sokola Rimba* also places the relationship between humans and nature as a central element of cultural identity. This similarity suggests that the media tends to use ecological aspects as the primary marker in representing indigenous communities to audiences.

However, the reflective representations presented remain selective. Broadcasts predominantly highlight traditional activities and harmonious relationships with nature, while other issues such as access to education, health, social change, and land conflicts faced by indigenous communities receive inadequate coverage. This finding suggests that the media never fully reflects reality, but rather selects certain aspects deemed interesting and relevant to present to the audience (McQuail, 2010).

Intentional Approach: The Producer's Perspective in Shaping Meaning

The intentional approach emphasizes that meaning is influenced by the message creator's intentions and perspective (Hall, 1997). In *Jejak Petualang*, the producers appear to be attempting to build a positive image of the Sundanese people as guardians of the forest and part of Indonesia's cultural heritage. The narrative heavily emphasizes local wisdom, simplicity, and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. One excerpt demonstrating this intention is when the host says:

"The Anak Dalam tribe is not a backward society. They are guardians of the forest, inheritors of wisdom that maintains the balance of nature." (*Trans7 Adventure Trail*, 2018, 00:08:42)

This narrative demonstrates an effort to promote a positive image of Indigenous Peoples (SAD) as part of the nation's cultural heritage. The producers present them not as objects in need of "rescue," but as subjects possessing knowledge and noble values. Through this strategy, the SAD community is represented as a group possessing ecological knowledge and cultural values worthy of respect. These findings suggest an educational orientation aimed at introducing local culture to a wider audience. In this context, the media serves as a means of cultural preservation and dissemination of knowledge about indigenous communities. This finding is reinforced by research by Fadli and Elviria (2025), which shows that cultural representations in the media are constructed through the selection of specific symbols and narratives, so that the cultural identity presented is a construct, not a completely neutral reality.

However, behind these good intentions lies an ideological ambivalence. The presenter, as an outsider, always acts as an intermediary between the audience and the SAD community. He often speaks about SAD, not with SAD. In several scenes, the host uses terms like "unique," "interesting," or "different from us," for example:

"They don't know technology, but that's precisely why they continue to protect nature in their own unique way." (*Trans7 Adventure Trail*, 2018, 00:10:30)

Nevertheless, these positive intentions still demonstrate the existence of symbolic power relations. The presenter and narrator act as those explaining the lives of Indigenous Peoples to the audience. The use of terms such as "unique," "interesting," or "different from us" indicates the symbolic boundaries between indigenous and modern communities. These findings demonstrate that cultural representations are not entirely neutral, as they are influenced by the perspectives of the message creator and the target audience. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) view of symbolic power, where dominant groups have the power to determine how other groups are perceived by the public.

Constructionist Approach: Language, Visuals, and Symbols Construct Meaning

The constructionist approach views that meaning is formed through language, symbols, and the representational systems used by the media (Hall, 1997). In *Jejak Petualang*, the construction of meaning regarding SAD is built through a combination of verbal narrative, visual language, and audio elements.

1. Verbal Narrative

Verbally, the narrative emphasizes the SAD community's closeness to nature and ancestral traditions. The language used tends to portray them as a simple, natural community that still upholds traditional values. On the one hand, this narrative demonstrates respect for local culture. However, on the other hand, this use of language also has the potential to create an image of indigenous peoples as outside the mainstream of modern life. One example is:

"For them, the forest is not just a place to live, but a mother who gives life." (*Trans7 Adventure Trail, 2018, 00:12:17*)

This quote carries symbolic meaning that the SAD have a spiritual connection to nature. This narrative places them in a high moral position as guardians of the ecosystem and their ancestral heritage. However, it also indirectly constructs them as a "natural" and "pure" group, distanced from modernity. This language reinforces romantic imagery and othering, the process of framing other groups as "different" (Barker, 2004).

2. Visual Language

Visually, the film utilizes long-range shots, highlighting the silence of the forest, and depicting the SAD group walking in small rows. Natural lighting and a predominance of green-brown hues emphasize their connection to nature. In several scenes, the camera moves in slow motion to depict activities such as hunting or traditional dancing, reinforcing the mystical and sacred atmosphere.

This kind of visualization creates a romantic primitivism, the view that indigenous peoples live in a sacred state untouched by modernity (Bourdieu, 1991). Yet, in social reality, the SAD community also experiences various processes of adaptation, interaction with outsiders, and complex social change. Thus, seemingly positive representations still have the potential to simplify a more diverse social reality.

This visual construction suggests that the media tends to portray indigenous communities through a romantic perspective that emphasizes simplicity and closeness to nature. As a result, the public may perceive Indigenous Peoples as static and unchanging communities, when in reality, they are constantly adapting to various economic, educational, and environmental changes.

3. Sound and Background Music

Background music plays a powerful symbolic role. Soft, traditional music is used to depict forest scenes, while more rhythmic music is used when the presenter interacts with the community. The sounds of insects, trickling water, and birdsong reinforce the naturalistic feel. This audio editing creates a peaceful, "pure nature" atmosphere, but also creates a distance between the urban audience and the indigenous people, who are perceived as living in a "different" world.

Ambivalent Representation: Between Admiration and Stereotype

Research findings indicate that the representation of the Suku Anak Dalam (Children of the Suku Anak Dalam) in *Jejak Petualang* (Adventure Tracks) is ambivalent. On the one hand, the show provides a space for appreciation of local culture by showcasing values of togetherness, ecological wisdom, and a harmonious relationship with nature. This representation contributes to increased public understanding of the existence of indigenous communities and the importance of preserving local culture. The ecological message conveyed in this show aligns with the concept of "cultural ecological awareness" (Muhaimin, 2023).

However, on the other hand, the media continues to maintain the old construct that indigenous peoples are exotic groups, separate from the modern world, and in need of "introduction" to the public. The use of the "us" and "them" dichotomy, the emphasis on cultural uniqueness, and the dominant visualization of traditional life indicate a process of othering that

constructs symbolic boundaries between majority and minority groups. For example, when a presenter says:

"It's not easy adapting to a forest like this. But for them, this is a life that's become one with their souls." (*Trans7 Adventure Trail*, 2018, 00:20:12)

This quote subtly positions SAD as an "other subject" distinct from the audience. In Hall's (1997) analysis of representation, this is a form of binary opposition in which modern society is positioned as "us," while indigenous peoples are positioned as "them." Thus, although this show aims to educate and preserve local culture, it still reproduces a hierarchical view of dominant and minority cultures.

Cultural Implications and Media Awareness

This ambivalence demonstrates how media plays a dual role as a means of education and a tool for ideological reproduction (Barker, 2004). Media not only serves as a means of cultural documentation but also as an arena for the production of meaning influenced by dominant cultural values and institutional interests. The implication of these findings is the importance of improving cultural media literacy so that the public can critically read representations. Furthermore, television producers are expected to employ a participatory approach, involving indigenous communities in the production process. Thus, representations of indigenous communities in the media need to be critically understood as they can contribute to shaping public perceptions of a group's cultural identity.

These findings demonstrate the importance of implementing more participatory representation principles in media production. Involving indigenous communities in the production process can reduce the dominance of external perspectives and enable these communities to convey their cultural identities more authentically. Thus, media serves not only as a means of cultural documentation but also as a space for dialogue that promotes fair representation.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the *Trans7* episode *Jejak Petualang* (Adventures of the SAD Forest Heritage) represents the Suku Anak Dalam through Stuart Hall's three representational approaches: reflective, intentional, and constructionist. In the reflective approach, the SAD people are portrayed as an indigenous community that lives in harmony with nature and possesses strong ecological knowledge. In the intentional approach, the producer attempts to build a positive image of the SAD as guardians of the forest and part of Indonesia's cultural richness. Meanwhile, in the constructionist approach, meaning about the SAD is formed through the use of narratives, visuals, and symbols that emphasize their closeness to nature and ancestral traditions.

The main findings of this study indicate that the representation of the Suku Anak Dalam in *Jejak Petualang* (Adventure Tracks) is ambivalent. On the one hand, the media provides a space for appreciating the cultural values, local wisdom, and ecological awareness of indigenous communities. However, on the other hand, the media continues to reproduce stereotypes by depicting the Suku Anak Dalam as an exotic, traditional group, and distinct from modern society. This situation suggests that media representation functions not only as a means of cultural documentation but also as a process of constructing meaning influenced by particular perspectives and interests.

This research emphasizes the importance of more participatory representation practices in the media, particularly in reporting and documenting indigenous communities. Involving indigenous communities in the content production process can help provide fairer, more authentic representations that are less bogged down in cultural stereotypes. Future research is

recommended to examine the representation of indigenous communities on various media platforms, such as digital and social media, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of cultural identity in contemporary media spaces.

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