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REPRESENTING SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN *PANGKU*: AN SDG 10 PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic inequality extends beyond income disparities to include constrained employment choices, discriminatory treatment, and unequal access to essential services. This study examines how socioeconomic inequality is represented in *Pangku* and explains its relevance to Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10. It employed an interpretive qualitative approach and media text analysis informed by Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation. Primary data were collected through repeated viewings and systematic documentation of the entire film. Two key scene sequences were selected based on their depiction of constrained opportunities, unequal treatment, and the strength of their narrative and audiovisual elements. The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that Sartika's occupational transition represents the constrained employment choices available to economically disadvantaged women and the commodification of the female body. Meanwhile, the rejection of Bayu's school enrollment represents administrative exclusion that restricts equal access to education. Together, these sequences construct inequality as a multilayered process operating through gender, employment, family status, administrative requirements, and education, with consequences that may persist across generations. SDG 10 is used as a contemporary interpretive framework for a film set during Indonesia's 1998 economic crisis rather than as a direct measure of policy achievement. This study contributes to research on film representation by linking the experiences of vulnerable groups to the principles of inclusion and equal opportunity.

Keywords: socioeconomic inequality, representation, *Pangku*

INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic inequality remains one of the major challenges facing Indonesia. It is reflected not only in income disparities but also in unequal access to education, healthcare services, decent employment, and other development resources. Consequently,

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some social groups have fewer opportunities than others to improve their quality of life. According to Statistics Indonesia (BPS), Indonesia's Gini ratio reached 0.375 in March 2025, indicating that inequality in the distribution of household expenditure persists. During the same period, the poverty rate stood at 8.47%, representing approximately 23.85 million people. These figures demonstrate that poverty and socioeconomic inequality continue to pose significant challenges to national development. Such conditions indicate that inequality concerns not only economic disparities but also unequal access to opportunities for improving one's quality of life. Social inequality may be reflected in differences in economic conditions, employment, education, lifestyle, and social class, which ultimately shape interpersonal relations in everyday life (Setiawan & Yoedtadi, 2025). Therefore, socioeconomic inequality is not merely reflected in statistical data but is also experienced as a social reality by various groups in Indonesian society.

Socioeconomic inequality is not only a challenge for Indonesia but also a global issue affecting many countries. Various forms of inequality, including poverty, discrimination, gender inequality, and unequal access to education, employment, and public services, continue to hinder the achievement of inclusive and equitable development. Afifulloh (2025) explains that social injustices, including discrimination based on gender and social class, may be continuously reproduced in society and represented through media, particularly film. Similarly, Pramudia (2025) argues that film functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a cultural product that uses systems of signs to represent social realities, ideologies, and power relations. Film can therefore serve as a medium through which social issues are constructed, interpreted, and understood. At the global level, efforts to reduce inequality are embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a development agenda that promotes inclusive and sustainable development while ensuring that no one is left behind. One goal that directly addresses this issue is SDG 10, which focuses on reducing inequality within and among countries.

Sustainable Development Goal 10, Reduced Inequalities, is particularly relevant to the issue of social inequality because it seeks to reduce disparities both within and among countries. This goal emphasizes that sustainable development should not focus solely on economic growth but must also promote an inclusive and equitable society that provides equal opportunities for all individuals. The challenges associated with achieving SDG 10 include economic disparities, social exclusion, discrimination, and limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities among vulnerable groups (Bhandari, 2024). Accordingly, SDG 10 addresses not only income distribution but also the various forms of inequality that restrict participation in development. More specifically, Target 10.2 seeks to empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all people, regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, origin, or economic status. The United Nations Extended Report: Goal 10 (2025) indicates that approximately two-thirds of countries have made progress in promoting

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social inclusion and reducing the proportion of people living below 50% of the national median income. However, progress remains highly uneven across regions. Target 10.3 emphasizes the importance of ensuring equal opportunities by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and social practices. Nevertheless, the report shows that approximately one in five people worldwide experienced discrimination during the previous 12 months, particularly on the basis of gender, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, and educational background. These conditions demonstrate that achieving SDG 10 requires stronger commitments to creating more inclusive and equitable societies free from discrimination.

Socioeconomic inequality can be understood not only through statistical data and government policies but also through the ways in which media construct meanings about the lives of particular social groups. As a form of media, film is a cultural text that uses characters, dialogue, conflict, space, sound, and visual elements to construct meanings about social reality. This study employs the constructionist approach within Stuart Hall’s theory of representation. According to Hall (1997), representation is not a direct reflection of reality but a process through which meaning is produced using language and systems of signs. Accordingly, *Pangku* does not merely depict poverty and socioeconomic inequality; it also constructs particular ways of understanding economically disadvantaged women, constrained employment choices, and socially excluded groups. Stuart Hall’s theory of representation was selected because this study examines how socioeconomic inequality is constructed through the film’s narrative and audiovisual elements.

One film that is particularly relevant to this study is *Pangku*, directed by Reza Rahadian. The film follows Sartika, a pregnant woman who faces economic hardship and severely constrained employment opportunities. To support herself and raise Bayu, Sartika works at a roadside coffee stall. Bayu later encounters barriers to school enrollment because of issues related to his identity and incomplete civil registration documents. The film was selected because it portrays socioeconomic inequality as an interconnected issue involving poverty, limited employment opportunities for women, the commodification of women’s bodies, and barriers to children’s access to education. Through the experiences of Sartika and Bayu, *Pangku* illustrates how socioeconomic inequality operates in everyday life and may continue from one generation to the next.

Several previous studies have examined *Pangku* from gender and feminist perspectives. Fitriyah (2026) discusses the double exploitation of women through materialist feminism and social reproduction theory, while Sadriani (2026) examines the female body as a site of power relations. These studies demonstrate that existing discussions of *Pangku* have largely focused on women’s experiences and gender-based injustice, examining Sartika’s position in isolation rather than in relation to Bayu’s subsequent experiences. Meanwhile, Setiawan and Yoedtadi (2025) examine the representation of social inequality in *Dua Hati Biru* through differences in employment,

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education, lifestyle, and social class, without addressing how such inequality may be transmitted from one generation to the next. What remains unexamined in this body of research is how a mother's constrained employment choices and a child's exclusion from education operate together, within a single film, as one interconnected and intergenerational representation of inequality rather than as separate thematic concerns. This is the specific gap the present study addresses. In contrast to prior work on *Pangku*, the present study investigates the relationship between Sartika's constrained employment choices and the educational barriers experienced by Bayu as interconnected representations of socioeconomic inequality across generations. The analysis employs the constructionist approach within Stuart Hall's theory of representation and relates the findings to the principles of social inclusion and equal opportunity contained in Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of SDG 10. This study therefore offers a perspective on how *Pangku* represents socioeconomic inequality not only through income disparities but also through constrained employment choices, administrative exclusion, and interconnected barriers to education.

Based on the preceding discussion, *Pangku* was selected as the object of this study because it represents multiple forms of socioeconomic inequality through the experiences of its characters. The experiences of Sartika and Bayu demonstrate the connections among economic pressure, constrained employment choices, women's social position, and barriers to education faced by vulnerable groups. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How is socioeconomic inequality represented through characters, dialogue, conflict, and setting in *Pangku*? and (2) How does this representation relate to Target 10.2 on social, economic, and political inclusion and Target 10.3 on equal opportunity and the reduction of discriminatory practices within SDG 10? This study aims to analyze the representation of socioeconomic inequality in *Pangku* and explain its relevance to Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of SDG 10. It seeks to contribute to communication studies, particularly research on media and film representation, by demonstrating how socioeconomic inequality is constructed through characters' experiences and connected to the principles of social inclusion and equal opportunity promoted by SDG 10.

METHODS

This study employed an interpretive qualitative approach and media text analysis. This approach was selected because the study sought to understand and interpret how socioeconomic inequality was constructed and given meaning through characters, dialogue, actions, facial expressions, spatial settings, and audiovisual elements in *Pangku* (2025). Rather than merely describing the content of selected scenes, the study interpreted the meanings, power relations, and social perspectives constructed through the film's representations. An interpretive qualitative approach was therefore considered appropriate for examining the representation of socioeconomic inequality in *Pangku*.

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The study used the constructionist approach within Stuart Hall’s theory of representation as its interpretive framework. This approach views meaning as socially constructed through language and systems of signs rather than as a direct reflection of social reality. Stuart Hall’s theory of representation was used to examine how characters, dialogue, actions, gestures, facial expressions, costumes, settings, shot composition, and other audiovisual elements constructed meanings of socioeconomic inequality in *Pangku*. After these representational meanings had been identified, the findings were related to Target 10.2, which concerns social, economic, and political inclusion, and Target 10.3, which concerns equal opportunity and the reduction of discriminatory practices under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10. Thus, Stuart Hall’s theory of representation served as the theoretical framework, while SDG 10 functioned as a contextual framework for interpreting the social relevance of the findings.

The object of this study was *Pangku*, a film directed by Reza Rahadian and released in 2025. The film was selected because it represents several forms of socioeconomic inequality, including constrained employment choices, the exploitation of women, and barriers to educational access. The units of analysis included scene sequences, dialogue, characters’ facial expressions, gestures, costumes, props, settings, shot composition, and other audiovisual elements that contributed to the construction of socioeconomic inequality. Scenes were selected according to three criteria: (1) they portrayed limitations on the characters’ choices or opportunities; (2) they depicted unequal treatment of vulnerable groups; and (3) they contained narrative or audiovisual elements that reinforced representations of socioeconomic inequality. Applying these criteria across the full film, the researchers initially identified several candidate scenes involving Sartika’s and Bayu’s experiences of hardship; the two sequences discussed in this study were retained because they most consistently satisfied all three criteria at once and because each was resolved through a single, self-contained scene rather than being distributed across multiple, loosely connected moments, which allowed for a more focused analysis of signs and meaning. In operational terms, Stuart Hall’s theory of representation was applied by treating dialogue, gesture, facial expression, costume, spatial arrangement, and camera work as signs, and by asking what meaning each sign or combination of signs constructed about the characters’ social position; these interpretations were then cross-checked against the coding sheet and discussed among the researchers to reduce individual bias. Following the coding process, the findings were grouped according to the representational categories that emerged and were subsequently related to Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of SDG 10.

The study used both primary and secondary data. The primary data were obtained from *Pangku* (2025) through repeated viewings of the entire film. During the viewing process, the researchers recorded the storyline, timecodes, dialogue, characters’ actions, facial expressions, costumes, settings, visual composition, and sound elements related to the representation of socioeconomic inequality. Each scene that met the selection criteria

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was documented in a coding sheet and reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the data description. The primary data were collected in July 2026 through Netflix. The secondary data were obtained through a literature review of books, national and international journal articles, previous studies of *Pangku*, official United Nations reports, and Sustainable Development Goals documents. These secondary sources were used to develop the study’s conceptual framework and to compare the findings with those of previous research.

Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation. The researchers repeatedly viewed *Pangku* to identify scenes that represented socioeconomic inequality. Scenes that met the research criteria were selected based on their relevance to the study’s focus, namely constrained employment choices, unequal treatment of vulnerable groups, and barriers to educational access. The selected data were organized in an analytical table containing timecodes, dialogue, visual descriptions, and preliminary interpretations. These data provided the basis for the analysis using Stuart Hall’s theory of representation. The interpretations were then categorized according to themes of socioeconomic inequality before being related to Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of SDG 10.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, the researchers selected scenes relevant to the research focus and grouped them according to themes of socioeconomic inequality. The data were then presented in analytical tables and descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation. In the next stage, the representational meanings were interpreted using the constructionist approach within Stuart Hall’s theory of representation. The findings were subsequently related to Target 10.2 on social, economic, and political inclusion and Target 10.3 on equal opportunity and the reduction of discriminatory practices under SDG 10.

The credibility of the study was maintained through repeated viewings of the film, systematic data recording, and comparison of the interpretations with Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, previous studies, and official Sustainable Development Goals documents, particularly those related to SDG 10. The researchers also documented the scene-selection process, interpretive decisions, and the basis for grouping the data so that the analytical process could be traced and reviewed. These procedures were intended to strengthen the credibility of the findings and minimize subjectivity during the interpretation process.

RESULTS

Based on the coding of scenes related to socioeconomic inequality, the study identified two key scene sequences that most clearly represented constrained opportunities and the exclusion of vulnerable groups. The first sequence depicts Sartika’s

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occupational transition, representing her limited employment choices and the commodification of the female body. The second sequence portrays the rejection of Bayu’s school enrollment, representing administrative exclusion from access to education.

Table 1. Summary of the Scene Analysis

No	Scene	Timecode, Description, and Key Dialogue	Form of Inequality	Image
1	Sartika Begins Working at Bu Maya’s Coffee Stall	<i>1:19:30-1:21:55.</i> Sartika accepts work at Bu Maya’s coffee stall after her wages as a daily agricultural laborer prove insufficient to support herself and Bayu. The sequence contains no dialogue and instead emphasizes Bu Maya applying makeup to Sartika, Sartika’s tears, and her change into more revealing clothes before she begins serving customers.	Constrained employment choices among economically disadvantaged women and the commodification of the female body.	 Figure 1. Source: Netflix
2	Bayu is Denied Enrollment in Elementary School	<i>00:54:00 - 00:55:15</i> Sartika brings Bayu to enroll in an elementary school. When asked to provide	Administrative exclusion from a basic public service, namely education.	 Figure 2. Source: Netflix

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		the parents' names, Sartika responds, "I am Sartika Puspita," but is unable to provide the name of Bayu's biological father. The principal states, "The father's name is important because only the father's name can be listed on the diploma Sartika and Bayu exchange glances before Sartika looks silently at the principal.		
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In the first scene sequence, from 1:19:30-1:21:55, Sartika arrives at Bu Maya's coffee stall after previously working as a low-paid daily agricultural laborer. Her arrival and the preparations made by Bu Maya indicate that Sartika has accepted the job. No dialogue occurs during the sequence; meaning is constructed entirely through actions, facial expressions, costume, and camera work. Bu Maya applies makeup to Sartika, while the camera presents the process in close-up and eventually frames Sartika's tear-filled eyes as she wipes them herself. Bu Maya then selects more revealing clothes for Sartika, after which the sequence cuts directly to Sartika serving coffee and massaging customers. The absence of dialogue and the contrast between the makeover and Sartika's expression of sadness indicate that her decision to take the job does not result entirely from freedom of choice. Instead, it is shaped by economic pressure represented through her body, facial expressions, change of costume, and transition into a different working environment.

In the second scene sequence, from 00:54:00 - 00:55:15, Sartika attempts to enroll Bayu in elementary school. The principal emphasizes that the father's name must be included on the school certificate. Sartika is unable to provide the information, after which she and Bayu exchange a silent glance. The dialogue, together with the visual positioning of Sartika and Bayu seated side by side across from the principal's desk, constructs Bayu's access to education as dependent on information about his father rather than on his academic ability or readiness to attend school. The scene therefore represents how

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administrative requirements may produce unequal treatment in access to educational services.

Taken together, these two sequences show that the film constructs inequality through two distinct mechanisms: the informal negotiation of a woman’s body and labor, and the formal, administrative gatekeeping of a child’s access to school. The following discussion interprets these mechanisms in relation to Stuart Hall’s theory of representation and situates them within Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of SDG 10.

DISCUSSION

1. Unequal Employment Opportunities and the Female Body as an Economic Commodity

Sartika’s occupational transition represents the female body as a site where economic pressure and power relations operate. The scene unfolds without dialogue, allowing meaning to be constructed entirely through nonverbal signs, including changes in costume, facial expressions, and Bu Maya’s control over Sartika’s appearance and body. From Stuart Hall’s constructionist perspective, the absence of dialogue reinforces the meaning produced through these visual signs because Sartika’s body and facial expressions become the primary systems through which viewers interpret the event. The application of makeup, the change into more revealing clothes, and Sartika’s tears, which she immediately wipes away, construct her employment decision as neither entirely voluntary nor freely made. Instead, the sequence presents it as a silent negotiation between the need to survive and the demands of informal labor. This representation resonates with Target 10.2 of SDG 10 because it illustrates the limited economic inclusion experienced by women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this study does not directly evaluate the achievement of SDG 10; rather, it uses the target as a framework for interpreting the forms of exclusion represented in the film. This finding is consistent with Sadriani’s (2026) discussion of the female body as a site of power relations in *Pangku* and supports Fitriyah’s (2026) argument regarding the double exploitation of women.

The findings further suggest that economic inequality concerns not only differences in income but also an individual’s capacity to choose safe and dignified employment. Although Sartika appears to accept the position at Bu Maya’s coffee stall, the film does not present her with an alternative form of employment capable of supporting herself and Bayu. Her decision can therefore be understood as a structurally constrained choice. Bird and Rieker (2008) explain that individual choices are shaped by conditions operating at the levels of family, employment, community, and public policy. In Sartika’s case, the film most clearly depicts constraints at the family and employment levels: as a single mother, she bears responsibility for supporting her family, while the

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employment opportunities available to her do not provide sufficient income. Her decision to work at the coffee stall is therefore not presented as an expression of complete freedom but as a response to a range of options already narrowed by economic pressure and family responsibility.

2. Administrative Exclusion and Intergenerational Inequality

The rejection of Bayu’s school enrollment represents how administrative requirements may become barriers to educational access for children from vulnerable families. In this scene, the school’s decision is not based on Bayu’s academic ability or readiness to attend school but on the absence of information about his biological father and incomplete civil registration documents. The principal’s insistence that the father’s name is required for the school certificate reinforces this condition. The film consequently constructs the meaning that procedures appearing neutral may produce unequal outcomes when applied to individuals from different social circumstances. This interpretation does not suggest that all educational administrative procedures are inherently discriminatory. Rather, it demonstrates how the film represents the experience of a child who loses an educational opportunity because his family is unable to satisfy particular administrative requirements.

Although *Pangku* was released in 2025, its story is set during Indonesia’s 1998 economic crisis. SDG 10 is therefore employed as a contemporary interpretive framework for understanding the representations of inequality in the film rather than as a policy framework that existed during the historical period depicted. Similarly, this study does not provide a legal assessment of the school enrollment procedure shown in the film. Its purpose is to analyze the social meanings constructed through the experiences of Sartika and Bayu.

The relationship between Sartika’s and Bayu’s experiences illustrates a pattern of intergenerational inequality, in which parents’ limited resources, employment opportunities, and social position influence their children’s life chances. Sartika’s economic hardship does not affect only her own life; it also contributes to Bayu’s difficulties in gaining access to education. This representation relates to Target 10.3 of SDG 10 because it highlights unequal opportunities experienced by children from vulnerable families and the consequences of practices that produce unequal treatment. The film therefore constructs inequality as a condition that may be reproduced from one generation to the next through restricted access to employment, administrative recognition, and public services. This finding extends the study by Setiawan and Yoedtadi (2025) by demonstrating that inequality in film may be represented not only through differences in employment, lifestyle, and social class but also through administrative requirements that limit educational opportunities.

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General Implications

Overall, *Pangku* represents socioeconomic inequality as an interconnected and intergenerational issue. Sartika’s constrained employment choices affect not only her life as a woman and single mother but also the social circumstances that subsequently restrict Bayu’s access to education. Through the two scene sequences, the film constructs inequality not as a single or isolated problem but as a multilayered process operating through gender, employment, family status, administration, and education. These findings demonstrate the relevance of the principles of inclusion and equal opportunity contained in Targets 10.2 and 10.3 of SDG 10 for interpreting the experiences of vulnerable groups represented in the film.

CONCLUSION

This study found that *Pangku* represents socioeconomic inequality through two interconnected sequences of experience. Sartika’s occupational transition illustrates the constrained employment choices available to economically disadvantaged women and the commodification of the female body as an economic resource. Meanwhile, the rejection of Bayu’s school enrollment represents administrative exclusion that restricts equal access to education. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, the dialogue, costumes, facial expressions, conflicts, settings, and other audiovisual elements in the two scene sequences construct inequality not only as a disparity in income but also as a restriction on individual choice and access to opportunities. These findings relate to Target 10.2 concerning social and economic inclusion and Target 10.3 concerning equal opportunity and the reduction of discriminatory practices. The relationship between Sartika’s and Bayu’s experiences further demonstrates how inequality may persist across generations. This study is limited to two key scene sequences from a single film and therefore does not encompass all forms of socioeconomic inequality represented in *Pangku*. Future research may examine additional scenes, compare representations across multiple films, or investigate how audiences interpret representations of socioeconomic inequality.

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