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# Unravelling the Cinematic Tapestry of Immigration: A Socio-Cultural Dissection of Indonesian Migrant Labor in Rawuh (2019)

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## Abstract

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*This article addresses the representation of Indonesian migrant labor experiences, particularly from Jember, in local cinema by presenting a multifaceted analysis of the film Rawuh (2019). The study emphasizes the film's depiction of socio-cultural dynamics and its contribution to existing discourses on immigration and migrant labor. Utilizing close textual analysis and scrutinizing mise-en-scène elements such as setting, lighting, costume, and props, the paper probes the film's representation of the rural community's aspirations for upward social mobility, as well as the repercussions of immigration on the characters' lives and societal dynamics. Moreover, by integrating theories by Pierre Bourdieu and pertinent literature on social class, cultural capital, and habitus, the study delves into the film's portrayal of social class and inequality, illuminating the intricate interplay between cultural assets, social stratification, and the quest for distinction. Through a rigorous examination of the film, the study underscores the ways in which Rawuh (2019) intersects with and contributes to ongoing discourses on immigration, labor, and global economic forces, accentuating the film's*

*pertinence to contemporary debates surrounding the experiences and challenges encountered by Indonesian migrant workers from Jember. Based on the analysis also serves as evidence that local films have the potential to offer a more authentic portrayal of their respective societies, as they tend to closely engage with the prevalent issues in their immediate surroundings.*

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### **Keywords**

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*Rawuh, immigration, socio-cultural analysis, Bourdieu, Indonesian migrant labor*

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### **Introduction**

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Immigration has become a prominent issue in Indonesia, with a significant number of people leaving the country to work as migrant laborers in other parts of the world. The issue of immigration has been explored in Indonesian cinema, with a number of films focusing on the experiences of migrant workers and their families. This article aims to examine the portrayal of immigrants in Indonesian cinema, with a specific focus on the local film entitled *Rawuh* (2019).

The local Indonesian film *Rawuh* (2019), directed by Agung Kurwian, presents a compelling narrative centered around Jumarno, a materialistic cattle broker, and the anticipated return of his eldest son, Zainu, from working as a migrant worker in Malaysia for over two years. The film delves into the complex dynamics of social class, materialism, and the impact of migrant labor on family and community relationships. *Rawuh* (2019) has made remarkable strides in film festivals both locally and internationally. The film's realistic portrayal of social class, materialism, migrant labor, and gender dynamics in a rural community setting has resonated with audiences and critics alike, earning it numerous accolades and recognition at various film festivals. Some notable achievements of *Rawuh* (2019) in film festivals include: Official Selection - Andalas Film Festival 2019; Official Selection - Global Migration Film Festival 2020; Official Selection - Sewon Screening 2020; Official Selection - SEAxSEA Southeast Asia x Seattle Film Festival 2020; Best Asian Short Film - Jharkand International Film Festival 2021; and Official Selection - Balinale International Film Festival 2021.

Drawing on the works of prominent scholars in migration studies, this

article examines the themes and messages conveyed through the representation of immigrants in *Rawuh* (2019), with a particular focus on how the film portrays the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Specifically, this article explores how the film's portrayal of migrant workers intersects with broader discourses on immigration, labor, and the impact of global economic forces on local communities.

Through an analysis of *Rawuh* (2019), this article contributes to the broader discourse on immigration in Indonesia, shedding light on the complex and often ambiguous representations of migrant laborers in Indonesian cinema, especially representing Jember, Indonesia. By engaging with existing literature and using the framework of discourse analysis, this article offers a nuanced and insightful analysis of the portrayal of immigrants in *Rawuh* (2019), and the larger socio-political and cultural forces that shape this representation.

The achievements of *Rawuh* (2019) warrant a thorough analysis using both Bourdieuan lense, as this theoretical framework provide valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics present in the film. Pierre Bourdieu's theories on social class, habitus, and capital can offer a comprehensive understanding of the film's exploration of materialism and social stratification (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Specifically, the film highlights the tension between different forms of capital, as Jumarno's pursuit of material wealth stands in stark contrast to the unexpected outcome of Zainu's migrant labor experience. *Rawuh* 2019 invites viewers to reflect upon the role of habitus in shaping the characters' attitudes and behaviors, as well as how these dispositions influence their perception of success and social standing (Bourdieu, 1977).

By analyzing *Rawuh* (2019) through the lens of Bourdieu's theoretical framework, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the film's thematic elements and its socio-cultural implications. This approach allows for a more comprehensive examination of the characters' motivations, behaviors, and the impact of their actions on their community, while also shedding light on the broader societal context within which the narrative unfolds.

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### Research Method

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This study employs a methodical, multi-faceted approach to analyze the representation of immigrants in the Indonesian film *Rawuh* (2019) and its socio-cultural implications. The research methodology, drawing on Creswell's (2013) qualitative research principles, is organized

into distinct stages to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

Initially, an extensive literature review will be undertaken to survey existing research on Indonesian cinema, immigration, and migrant labor. This literature review aims to provide the necessary contextual foundation for the analysis of *Rawuh* (2019) by examining academic studies on the depiction of immigrants in Indonesian cinema and scholarly work on the wider socio-political and cultural forces that influence these representations (Creswell, 2013).

Subsequently, a detailed film analysis of *Rawuh* (2019) will be conducted, concentrating on the portrayal of immigrants and the themes of materialism, social class, and migrant labor. The film's narrative structure, character development, visual elements, and cinematography will be meticulously analyzed to identify the salient messages and themes conveyed. This analysis will serve as the foundation for the subsequent application of Bourdieuan.

In the third stage, Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework on social class, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986) will be applied to scrutinize the representation of materialism and social stratification in *Rawuh* (2019). The study will examine the interplay between various forms of capital and the role of habitus in shaping the characters' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of success and social standing.

The framework of discourse analysis will be utilized to examine how the film's portrayal of migrant workers intersects with broader discourses on immigration, labor, and global economic forces. The contribution or challenge of *Rawuh* (2019) to existing narratives on these topics will be assessed.

In the penultimate stage, semi-structured interviews with filmmakers, critics, scholars, and experts in the fields of Indonesian cinema and immigration studies will be carried out to gather their insights and opinions on *Rawuh* (2019) and its portrayal of immigrants, in line with Creswell's (2013) recommendations for qualitative research.

Finally, the key findings and insights garnered throughout the

research process will be encapsulated and discussed, focusing on the implications of the study for the wider discourse on immigration in Indonesia and the representation of migrant laborers in Indonesian cinema. Additionally, areas for future research and potential limitations of the study will be delineated.

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### Finding and Discussion

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#### Portrayals Of Immigration and Migrant Labor

An in-depth analysis of Rawuh (2019) focusing on portrayals of immigration and migrant labor can be conducted through a close examination of the film's mise-en-scène, which encompasses various aspects of the visual presentation, such as setting, lighting, costume, and props. Drawing on the works of Bordwell (2008) and Galt and Schoonover (2010), this analysis explores how these elements contribute to the overall narrative and thematic development of the film, providing insight into the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers and the impact of immigration on their families and communities.

#### *Setting*

The rural setting of Rawuh (2019) is integral to the portrayal of immigration and migrant labor. The agricultural community, with its limited economic opportunities and the omnipresent desire for upward social mobility, serves as a backdrop for the characters' motivations to seek work overseas (Galt & Schoonover, 2010). The contrast between the rural environment and the imagined prosperity of Malaysia, where Jumarno's son Zainu works as a migrant laborer, highlights the driving forces behind the decision to immigrate in search of better opportunities.



Figure 1 Rural Atmosphere (timecode 00:01:18)



Figure 2 Jumarno's House (timecode 00:06:33)

### ***Lighting***

The film's lighting choices contribute to the atmosphere and the emotional tone of the story. Natural lighting is predominantly used to emphasize the authenticity of the rural setting and the characters' experiences (Bordwell, 2008).



Figure 3 Sulastri's Kitchen timecode 00:08:40

On figure 3, it shows a kitchen situation with the use of natural light, indicating the condition of a kitchen in a village. The contrast between dimly lit interior scenes, representing the harsh realities and struggles faced by the characters, and the brightly lit outdoor scenes, symbolizing the hope for a better future through migration, effectively conveys the emotional impact of immigration on the community (Galt & Schoonover, 2010).

### ***Costume***

Costumes in *Rawuh* (2019) are essential for illustrating the social class and economic background of the characters. Traditional clothing worn by Jumarno and other community members reflects their cultural



identity and rural lifestyle. Additionally, the contrast between Jumarno's modest attire and his son Zainu and his wife more modern and urban clothing upon his return from Malaysia visually signifies the impact of migration on the characters' social and economic status.



Figure 4 Jumarno and the other Cattle trader timecode 00:13:11



Figure 5 Zainu and His Family Just Arrived from Malaysia timecode 00:33:55

### ***Props***

Props in the film serve to underscore the themes of materialism and social class. Jumarno's cattle, as his primary source of income and a symbol of his economic capital, are central to the portrayal of his material aspirations. The use of other props, such as money, televisions, and motorcycles, further emphasizes the characters' pursuit of material wealth and their desire to improve their social standing.



Figure 6 Jumarno Calling Zainu Asking about Money timecode: 00:13:40



Figure 8 Sulastri showed off her money timecode 00:20:35



Figure 7 Jumarno's House timecode 00:15:11

A meticulous examination of the mise-en-scène in *Rawuh* (2019) reveals crucial insights into the film's portrayal of immigration and migrant labor. The setting, lighting, costume, and props work together to create a visual narrative that underscores the motivations behind the characters' decisions to immigrate, the impact of migration on their lives, and the societal dynamics that shape their experiences.

### **Jumarno's Pursuit of Material Wealth and the Struggle for Recognition**

Jumarno's pursuit of material wealth in *Rawuh* (2019) is a central theme that underscores his character's motivations and actions. As a cattle broker, Jumarno engages in various transactions, which not only allow him to accumulate wealth but also demonstrate his shrewd business acumen. This pursuit of material wealth is driven by his desire to climb the social ladder and establish himself as a respected figure within his community. In the context of the film, Jumarno's relentless pursuit of wealth highlights the importance of economic capital in determining an individual's social standing.

Jumarno's fixation on the return of his eldest son, Zainu, further emphasizes his unyielding pursuit of material wealth. Throughout the film, Jumarno eagerly awaits Zainu's return, as he believes that the money Zainu has earned as a migrant laborer will significantly contribute to the family's economic capital. Jumarno's anticipation is fueled by the potential increase in social standing that this additional wealth may bring.

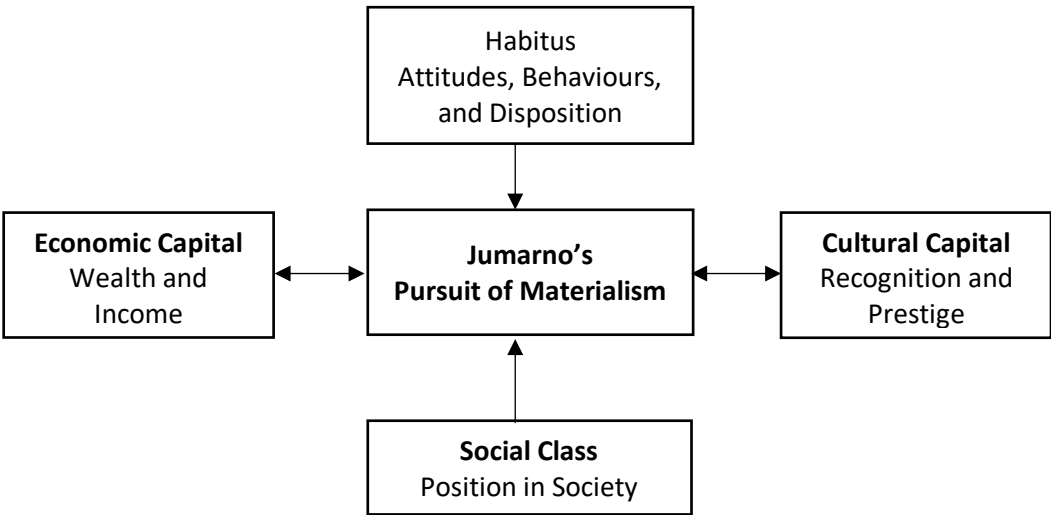


He envisions a better life for his family, where they can enjoy the fruits of their labor and gain recognition within the community.

Moreover, Jumarno's pursuit of material wealth manifests in his interactions with other community members. He often boasts about his business successes and the accomplishments of his son as a migrant laborer, seeking validation and acknowledgment from his peers. This behavior highlights Jumarno's desire to use his material wealth as a means of asserting his social position and garnering respect from others.

In addition, Jumarno's pursuit of material wealth is further complicated by the film's portrayal of the socio-cultural dynamics within the community. The film illustrates how the community's values and norms prioritize material success and social standing, further reinforcing Jumarno's ambitions. This context reveals the extent to which Jumarno's pursuit of wealth is shaped by the societal expectations and pressures that surround him.

Jumarno's pursuit of material wealth in *Rawuh* (2019) is a multifaceted aspect of his character, reflecting his ambitions to accumulate economic capital and improve his social standing. His relentless drive for wealth is evidenced through his profession as a cattle broker, his fixation on Zainu's return, and his interactions with community members. By exploring these dimensions, the film offers a compelling portrayal of the complex interplay between individual aspirations and the socio-cultural forces that shape them.



Tabel 1.1 The Complex Interplay Among Social Class, Habitus, and Capital in Jumarno

Jumarno's aspirations to improve his family's social standing are evident in his constant efforts to accumulate wealth through cattle trading. This demonstrates his habitus, shaped by the rural environment and its limited economic opportunities. Similarly, Zainu's decision to work as a migrant laborer in Malaysia reflects the shared habitus among the community members, who view migration as a path to financial success and social mobility. Bourdieu's concept of habitus refers to the socialized norms and dispositions that individuals develop as a result of their upbringing and environment (Bourdieu, 1990). The rural setting and the limited economic opportunities available to the characters contribute to the formation of their habitus, which is characterized by a strong desire for upward social mobility. This desire leads the characters to seek work overseas, as they perceive it as a means to accumulate economic and social capital.

The concept of cultural capital, as introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), plays a significant role in understanding the social dynamics and aspirations of the characters in *Rawuh* (2019). Cultural capital can be defined as the set of cultural assets and knowledge that individuals can use to improve their social standing. Through various examples in the film, we can observe how the characters seek to accumulate cultural capital as a means to elevate their social status and distinguish themselves from others within their community.



Figure 9 Sulastris invited people to the ceremony timecode 00:21:09

In one notable scene from the film as provided in figure 9, Jumarno and his wife decide to organize an exclusive circumcision ceremony for their second son, diverging from the more common practice of mass circumcision events in their community. This decision to opt for a private and exclusive ceremony, performed by a doctor using an advanced and painless laser technique, can be interpreted as an attempt to accumulate cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The choice of a more expensive and modern method of circumcision reflects the family's desire to adopt urban values and practices that they believe will set them apart from their neighbors and elevate their social status (Bourdieu, 1984).

Jumarno's wife's, Sulastris excessive preparations for the ceremony, such as purchasing an extravagant amount of groceries for catering purposes, further highlights their pursuit of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). This display of wealth showcases the family's improved economic situation, primarily due to Zainu's earnings from his work in Malaysia, and their intention to signal their elevated social status to the community.

Moreover, the presence of a renowned local religious leader (Kyai) at their son's circumcision ceremony serves as another example of the family's efforts to accumulate cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Inviting the respected Kyai not only signifies the family's religious devotion but also acts as a marker of their social standing within the community.

The film critically examines social class and inequality by portraying the challenges faced by rural communities, such as Jumarno's family, who grapple with scarce resources and opportunities (Suryahadi et al., 2009). Jumarno's attempts to accumulate wealth often encounter setbacks, like losing cattle to illness, which underscores the persistent social and economic inequalities within Indonesia (Yeoh & Ramdas, 2014). Moreover, the film highlights the contrasting lifestyles of those who have successfully migrated, such as Zainu's friend, who returns with motorcycle and fashionable clothes, representing the potential rewards of migration and the existing disparities within the community (Silvey, 2004).

However, there are cultural differences that emerge, such as Zainu returning to Jember with a wife and two children, with the latter being born out of wedlock, which goes against traditional customs that require marriage to be officiated with witnesses and parental presence (Smith-Hefner, 2005). This cultural discrepancy reveals that not all immigrants can bring pride in the context of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In fact, there are realities that need to be faced when returning to one's hometown. Some scenes also show that Zainu struggles to make a living in Malaysia (Hugo, 2007).

This nuanced portrayal of the challenges faced by migrants highlights that while migration can lead to economic gains and social mobility, it can also result in cultural clashes and unanticipated difficulties (Carling, 2002). In this way, the film provides a comprehensive and critical exploration of social class and inequality, illustrating the complex and multifaceted experiences of individuals impacted by migration.

**Challenging Assumptions: A Critical Analysis of Migrant Worker**

The portrayal of migrant workers in *Rawuh* (2019) intersects with and contributes to existing discourses on immigration, labor, and global economic forces in several ways. By delving into the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers and their families, the film provides a nuanced and realistic representation of the complex dynamics that underlie international migration.

Firstly, *Rawuh* (2019) contributes to the discourse on immigration by showcasing the motivations behind individuals' decisions to migrate. As discussed earlier, the film highlights the limited economic opportunities and the desire for upward social mobility that drive character like Zainu to seek work overseas (Suryahadi et al., 2009). This portrayal aligns with existing research on the "push" and "pull" factors that influence migration decisions, such as poverty, unemployment, and the prospect of better opportunities elsewhere (Carling, 2002).

Secondly, the film's depiction of the challenges faced by migrant workers, including cultural clashes and struggles to earn a living, adds to the discourse on labor and migration. The experiences of Zainu and his friend demonstrate that the realities of working abroad can be far from the idealized expectations that many migrants hold (Hugo, 2007). This portrayal is consistent with research on the often difficult and exploitative conditions that many migrant workers face, particularly in low-skilled jobs (Silvey, 2004).

Furthermore, *Rawuh* (2019) highlights the impact of global economic forces on migration and the perpetuation of social and economic inequalities within Indonesia (Yeoh & Ramdas, 2014). The film shows that rural communities, like Jumarno's, are disproportionately affected by these forces, with limited resources and opportunities contributing to the cycle of poverty and inequality. The experiences of Zainu and his friend, as portrayed in *Rawuh* (2019), align with the findings of Lindquist (2010), who notes that Indonesian migrant workers, particularly from rural areas like Jember, often face harsh realities and exploitative conditions in their destination countries, such as Malaysia. This situation is particularly prevalent among low-skilled workers who are vulnerable to deception and abuse by unscrupulous recruitment agencies. This perspective supports existing literature on the role of global economic forces in shaping migration patterns and exacerbating social and economic disparities both within and between countries (Carling, 2002). *Rawuh* (2019) effectively showcases the impact of global economic forces on migration

and the perpetuation of social and economic inequalities within Indonesia, which is consistent with the research conducted by Yeoh & Ramdas (2014). The film demonstrates how rural communities, like Jumarno's, are disproportionately affected by these forces, as limited resources and opportunities contribute to the cycle of poverty and inequality. This perspective is supported by Lindquist (2010), who emphasizes the role of global economic forces in shaping migration patterns and exacerbating social and economic disparities both within and between countries.

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### Conclusion

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Rawuh (2019) serves as a powerful and thought-provoking examination of the complexities of immigration and migrant labor in Indonesia. Through a meticulous analysis of the film's mise-en-scène and the broader socio-political and cultural implications of its portrayal of immigration and migrant labor, we have uncovered the multifaceted dynamics at play in the characters' lives and their communities. The film effectively highlights the challenges faced by rural communities, the role of cultural capital, and the impact of global economic forces on migration patterns and social and economic inequalities in Indonesia.

Moreover, Rawuh (2019) contributes to the public discourse on immigration and migrant labor by offering a nuanced and authentic representation of the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers and their families. This portrayal not only humanizes migrant workers but also has the potential to influence policy discussions and public opinion on immigration issues.

In light of the insights gained from our discussion, it is evident that Rawuh (2019) provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of immigration and migrant labor in Indonesia. By dissecting the film's various elements and exploring its socio-cultural context, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of immigration and the myriad factors that influence the experiences of migrant workers and their families. As a result, Rawuh (2019) stands as an important cinematic work that sheds light on the multifaceted realities of Indonesian migrant labor and fosters a more informed and compassionate discourse on the pressing issues of immigration and social inequality.

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