

Excavating American Values in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* (2002) Movie by Rudi sujarwo

Muhammad Fithratullah¹, Muhammad Gerhan Lentara²

petermuhammad@teknokrat.ac.id

Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia

Abstract

This study looks at how Rudy Soedjarwo's 2002 Indonesian film *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* portrays American ideals. Using Robert Kohls' (1984) framework of American values and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to find and examine cultural signs and symbols incorporated into the story and visual components of the movie. The analysis shows that the film's ideological fabric prominently incorporates a number of American values, such as individualism, personal freedom, the pursuit of self-expression, informality in social relationships, and the emphasis on romantic love as a personal choice. According to the results, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* serves as a cultural text that mediates and negotiates Western, especially American, value systems for domestic audiences in addition to being a love story set in a modern Indonesian setting. This essay contends that the movie is a reflection of larger cultural globalization processes in which local representations of youth, identity, and romance are reshaped by transnational media influences.

Keywords: *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta*, American values, representation, Stuart Hall, Robert Kohls

Introduction

Film is more than just an artistic creation; it is a potent tool for the construction, dissemination, and contestation of meanings, ideologies, and values. Cinema, one of the most pivotal kinds of popular culture, is essential in forming and mirroring the social imaginaries of the societies who make and watch it. The cross - cultural flow of ideas, conventions, and value systems has increased in the globalization age due to the transnational circulation of films, posing important concerns about the negotiation of local and global identities (Appdurai, 2020). Early in the 2000 Indonesian film saw a notable rebirth. The Indonesian film industry saw a stunning comeback in the 1990s, marked by an infusion of romantic adolescent films aimed at young viewers, after a decade-long fall in domestic film output. Among these, *Rudy Soedjarwo's Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* (2002), sometimes referred to as *AADC*, is a notable performance. The movie became a defining cultural document of its day after achieving unheard-of levels of critical and economic success. The movie became a defining cultural document of its day after achieving unheard of levels of critical and economic success. In the setting of downtown Jakarta, it shows the romantic connection between *Rangga* (*Nicholas Saputra*), an aloof and independent poet, and *Cinta* (*Dian Sastrowardoyo*), a popular high school student.

A detailed examination of AADC's narrative structure, character interactions, and thematic themes reveals a surprising resemblance with American ideals as postulated in the cultural literature, despite the film's clearly established metropolitan Indonesian setting. The characters of the movie exhibit characteristics that Robert Kohls (1984) defined as essential to American cultural orientation, including individualism, personal freedom, directness in interpersonal contact, and the preference for romantic love as a matter of personal choice. This poses a crucial question: to what degree does *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* serve as a platform

for the representation and dissemination of American ideals among Indonesian viewers? Stuart Hall's (2024) theory of representation offers the theoretical framework for a fruitful investigation of this issue. According to Hall, representation which is generally understood to encompass visual pictures, movies, and other semiotic systems is the creation of meaning through words. Meaning is created through systems of signs, codes, and norms rather than being intrinsic to things or occurrences. As cultural texts, movies transmit certain ideological stances and value systems that viewers decipher by either adopting prevailing interpretations, negotiating meanings, or rejecting them. Throughout the movie, a number of signs of American values can be seen, especially in the characters' emphasis on equality, self-expression, individual freedom, and personal success. In contrast to the traditional collectivist norms typically associated with Indonesian society, these values are demonstrated by the characters' autonomous decision-making, candid communication, and quest for personal identity.

Ada Apa Dengan Cinta (2002) is the subject of this paper's descriptive qualitative analysis, which aims to discover and understand the American ideals that are present in the story and *mise en scene*. The study aims to shed light on the ideological aspects of this well-known Indonesian film and add to more general scholarly discussions about cultural globalization, media, and identity in Southeast Asia by combining Hall's representational framework with Kohls' understanding of American values. This research is scoped into two major questions first what American values are represented in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta (2002)* and How are these values encoded through the film's narrative, characters, and visual elements?

Theory and Method

The theoretical foundation of this research is Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which was most thoroughly developed in his edited volume *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (2024). Hall argues that representation entails the construction of meaning through two interrelated systems: the mental concepts or representations that exist in our minds and the language signs, symbols, and codes through which these mental representations are expressed and communicated (Fithratullah, 2020). Hall proposes a constructivist approach in which meaning is created through the active interaction of encoding and decoding practices within culturally specific contexts, in opposition to the reflective view that language merely reflects a pre-existing reality and the intentional view that meaning is determined solely by the author's intentions (Hall, et al, 2024). The analysis of film, which uses intricate codes of cinematography, story, dialogue, acting, and sound to create specific interpretations of reality, is especially well suited for this constructivist method. This constructivist approach is applicable to analyze film, which operates through complex codes of cinematography, narrative, dialogue, performance, and sound to construct particular versions of reality. Hall's framework allows for a methodical analysis of how *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta's* narrative and visual components encode American values and how these encodings place Indonesian audiences in relation to specific ideological constructions of youth, romance, and selfhood.

The principles by which Americans live. According to Kohls, mainstream American culture is defined by thirteen fundamental values that set it apart from other cultural orientations. The second theoretical pillar of this study is Materialism/Acquisitiveness. These values include: Personal Control Over the Environment, Change, Time and Its Control, Equality and Egalitarianism, Individualism and Privacy, Self-Help Concept, Competition, Future Orientation, Action Orientation, Informality, Directness, Openness and Honesty, Practicality and Efficiency, Materialism (Hall, et al, 2024). The descriptive qualitative method

used in this study is especially appropriate for the interpretive analysis of cultural texts like movies. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focuses on comprehending and analyzing the interpretations that people and groups make of social and cultural phenomena. In the context of film analysis, this method entails a methodical, in-depth analysis of the story, characters, dialogue, cinematography, and mise en scene in order to pinpoint and characterize the patterns of meaning contained within.

Findings and Discussion

Individualism and Privacy: Rangga as the Embodiment of Self-Reliance.

Individualism identified as the most defining characteristic of American cultural orientation, is one of the most prominent American values encoded in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta*. American individualism is characterized by a de-emphasis on the claims of family, community, or collective identity and an emphasis on the individual's uniqueness, autonomy, and self-determination (Hoover, 2014). Rangga, the male lead in the movie, is the most potent example of this value in action (Fithratullah, 2020). Rangga is presented as a solitary, independent person who purposefully keeps social and emotional distance from his peers. His passion for literature he reads poetry by Chairil Anwar and is a poet himself—is what distinguishes him as a self-directed, introspective person who values inner life over social conformity. It is possible to interpret his refusal to engage in group activities, peer approval, and romantic conventions as an example of American style individualism, which prioritizes individual authenticity over group membership. Hall's theory of representation sheds light on the film's visual encoding of this individualism. In order to highlight his physical distance from the other characters, Rangga is often shown in medium close-up shots. His brief speech and sparse facial expressions suggest emotional independence and self-sufficiency. The mise-en-scène constantly links him to books, dimly lit areas, and solitude visual cues that code his individualism as both intellectually and romantically captivating and not just antisocial. In contrast to the collectivist orientation typically associated with Indonesian society, the film creates a representation of individualism through Rangga's characterization. His actions convey the notion that individual identity and personal growth can be pursued apart from social norms, reflecting a set of values frequently linked to Western, especially American, cultural ideals.

The way the movie portrays Rangga's individualism as a desirable trait exactly the trait that draws Cinta to him is a particularly clear example of its ideological work. This encoding normalizes and elevates an American cultural value within an Indonesian narrative context by positioning individualism as a mark of distinction and character depth rather than as a social problem (Mitchell, 2017). Personal independence, self-sufficiency, and the right to keep one's private life free from needless social interference are highly valued in American culture. The character Rangga in the movie *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* Successfully exemplifies these ideals by preferring to deal with personal issues on his own and by being reluctant to share his family's problems with others. His reserved demeanor is not seen negatively, but rather as an indication of his emotional fortitude, intellectual depth, and maturity.

Personal Freedom and the Pursuit of Self-Expression

Personal freedom the deeply held American belief that people have the right to choose their own path in life, make their own decisions, and express themselves without undue interference from outside authorities is closely tied to individualism (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta's* portrayal of romantic choice as an issue of personal autonomy serves as the most overt example of this value. A number of acts of Personal

Freedom and Pursuit of Self-Expression against the expectations of her social world are part of Cinta's growing attraction to Rangga in the movie. At first, Rangga is disapproved of by her peer group, which is represented by her close female friends, and Cinta is under social pressure to follow their opinions. The American ideal of personal freedom the right of the individual to make decisions based on genuine personal feeling rather than social convention (Putnam, 2025). That's perspective is embodied by Cinta's ultimate decision to follow her feelings for Rangga in spite of social disapproval. At the dialogue level, this portrayal of Personal Freedom is strengthened. Cinta is portrayed as a young lady who actively balances her own preferences with those of society. She is initially portrayed as a popular student who follows the rules of her peer group, but her relationship with Rangga encourages her to be more honest about her feelings, ideas, and personal preferences. The rhetoric of individual feeling and genuine self-expression that permeates Cinta's argument with her friend Alya in which she defends her right to like Rangga on her own terms resonates strongly with American discourses of personal autonomy. Individual emotional truth is prioritized over societal norms when Cinta declares that her feelings are her own and that she cannot and will not be dictated to by others in matters of the heart.

American values, especially the pursuit of individual self-expression and personal freedom are means to promotes people's freedom to express their thoughts, pursue their own goals, and make their own life decisions (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). When Cinta decides to pursue her feelings for Rangga in spite of peer pressure and social expectations, she exemplifies these ideals. Her readiness to defy popular opinion and put her own beliefs first serves as an example of the value of personal autonomy and emotional authenticity.

Hall's representational views encodes that Personal Freedom and Self-Expression are based on American ideological codes that are disseminated throughout the world through Hollywood films and popular culture. As a result, the movie can be understood as a place where these codes are translated into an Indonesian narrative framework, creating a hybrid text that balances regional social norms with widely accepted value systems.

Equality and Egalitarianism in Interpersonal Relationships

Equality and egalitarianism are fundamental American values that show up in the conviction that all people are equally valuable, regardless of their social background, and in the propensity to downplay or oppose social hierarchy in interpersonal relationships (Kohl, 1984). This value is encoded in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* in a number of significant ways, most notably in the way that romantic relationships are portrayed in the movie as partnerships between equals. The dynamics of Cinta and Rangga's relationship are noticeably egalitarian. AADC portrays Cinta as an active, assertive participant in the romantic relationship, in contrast to many previous Indonesian romantic films that more overtly depicted gender hierarchies. Instead of waiting patiently for Rangga to court her, she takes the initiative, pushes him intellectually, and expresses her own needs and annoyances. The main characters' interpersonal relationships, especially those between Cinta, Rangga, and their group of friends, serve as a representation of equality and egalitarianism.

The characters interact and communicate with each other on comparatively equal terms despite having different backgrounds, personalities, and levels of social popularity. Rangga, who is frequently reclusive and introverted, is not shown as socially superior to Cinta, a well-liked and successful student. Rather, their relationship grows as a result of respect for one another, communication, and understanding of one another's viewpoints. American cultural norms regarding gender equality in romantic relationships are reflected in this portrayal of female agency and relational equality (Bidadanure & Axelsen, 2025). The movie represents the perspective that a person's value is based on their character and mutual

understanding rather than their social standing. Media representations create specific meanings about social relationships.

This portrayal aligns with Robert Kohl's (1984) notion of equality and egalitarianism, which are fundamental principles of American culture. The majority of Americans think that everyone should be treated equally, regardless of their social background, financial situation, or place in society (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2026). In the movie, friendships and romantic relationships are based on equality, openness, and respect rather than strict social hierarchies, reflecting egalitarian ideals. The way the movie handles class is another example of how egalitarianism is portrayed. Despite Rangga's lower social standing in the school hierarchy and her broken family, the movie constantly portrays these distinctions as unimportant to the romantic relationship. An egalitarian ethos that is consistent with American ideals of meritocracy and the idea that social background has no bearing on one's value is encoded by the narrative's emphasis on character and genuine connection over social status.

Informality in Social Interactions

According to Kohls (1984), informality is a value that makes Americans uniquely American. He contends that Americans avoid formality and status distinctions in daily communication and instead treat others as equals in social interactions. *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* mainly conveys this value through its portrayal of youth culture and intergenerational dialogue. In contrast to the more formal codes of social interaction associated with traditional Indonesian cultural norms, the film's teenage characters engage in informal interactions with one another and, to a significant extent, with adult authority figures like teachers. The conversations are quick, informal, and characterized by the use of modern urban slang, indicating a generational culture that favors informal, horizontal communication methods over formal, hierarchical ones.

Stuart Hall's theory of representation states that characters' language, actions, and social customs are how media texts create and convey cultural meanings (Hall, et al, 2024). The everyday communication styles of the teenage characters in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* (2002) serve as a representation of informality in social interactions. Cinta and her friends engage in casual, impromptu, and conversational interactions with one another, frequently voicing their thoughts, feelings, and disagreements without formal social norms. Their friendships are marked by direct communication, humor, and informal language, which fosters a social atmosphere that prioritizes intimacy over hierarchical distance. Representation actively creates meaning, so these depictions represent a social culture that values interpersonal accessibility and openness, reflecting a more contemporary and egalitarian mode of interaction (Pitkin, 2023). According to Kohl (1984), informal relationships and communication styles are generally preferred in American society, where people are encouraged to interact amicably despite differences in status, age, or social position. This value is demonstrated in the movie by the way students interact with their peers and occasionally question viewpoints without undue regard for formal authority.

The way the movie depicts Cinta's relationship with her female peer group is one area where this encoding of informality is especially noticeable. Open, unrestrained communication, emotional directness, and a lack of formal social protocol are characteristics of the group dynamic. The American cultural ideal of friendship as an equal relationship characterized by mutual openness rather than social formality resonates with this mode of sociality (Hutapea & fithratullah, 2024). The movie supports the perspective that meaningful relationships are cultivated through openness, equality, and authenticity by depicting casual communication as normal and constructive. As a result, *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta?* reflects the influence of American Cultural values within Indonesian youth culture and reflects a social dynamic that is consistent with Kohl's concept of informality.

Directness, Openness, and Honesty in Communication

Directness and openness in communication the readiness to communicate one's ideas and emotions honestly and without hesitation are highly valued by Americans (Cooper, 2023). Ada Apa Dengan Cinta repeatedly emphasizes emotional honesty and genuine self-expression as indicators of integrity and romantic worthiness, which encodes this value.

Ada Apa Dengan Cinta? (2002), Cinta, Rangga, and their friends' interactions serve as examples of directness, transparency, and honesty in communication. Instead of hiding their thoughts, feelings, and disagreements behind oblique language, the characters often express them honestly. In this sense, the crucial confrontation between Cinta and Rangga near the end of the movie is representative. It is depicted as an act of moral courage when Cinta expresses her emotions in a straightforward and honest manner. In contrast to the more subtle conventions of previous Indonesian romantic cinema, the dialogue in the scene is remarkably direct, and close-up cinematography highlights the characters' facial expressions, signifying emotional authenticity. The movie presents communication as a process of genuine self-expression and understanding through these depictions (Hall et al, 2024). These depictions produce meanings that link open communication to emotional maturity, sincerity, and trust, making such behavior seem desirable in interpersonal relationships. The majority of Americans place a high value on direct and unambiguous communication, believing that people should express themselves honestly rather than using ambiguity or oblique cues (Cooper et al, 2023). These ideals are demonstrated by the characters' readiness to express their emotions and deal with problems honestly, even if doing so strains their friendships or romantic relationships. The focus on open communication implies that maintaining meaningful relationships and establishing trust depend on honesty.

The American value of directness can also be understood as being encoded in Rangga's own communicative style, which is simple, unadorned, and devoid of social artifice (Golijanin, 2023). The story gradually reframes his rejection of social graces and traditional politeness which was initially interpreted as antisocial as a radical honesty that Cinta eventually comes to respect and love. According to Hall, this narrative reframing is a hegemonic encoding that elevates directness and authenticity above socially mediated communication.

Future Orientation and the Valorization of Change

Finally, the narrative resolution of Ada Apa Dengan Cinta encodes American values of future orientation and the value of change. According to Kohls (1984), Americans are inherently future-focused, see change as progress, and place a high importance on personal development and transformation. This value is significantly encoded in the film's narrative arc, wherein both Cinta and Rangga experience personal transformation as a result of their encounter. As they negotiate friendship, love, and self-discovery throughout the movie, both characters experience profound emotional and intellectual changes. They embrace fresh viewpoints and experiences that mold their development rather than staying stuck in their original identities and social roles.

In Cinta's character arc, she moves away from peer pressure and social conformity in favor of more autonomy and authenticity. In line with American ideals of self-improvement and forward-thinkingness, future orientation and the valorization of change, which emphasizes optimism toward the future and the belief that progress is achieved through continuous improvement and adaptation this trajectory encodes a story of personal development and self-transformation (Beal, 2011). In contrast, Rangga's path entails a shift from seclusion to openness and connection a metamorphosis that the story likewise presents as constructive personal development.

In contrast to upholding the status quo, American culture typically values innovation, personal development, and the pursuit of better opportunities. These ideals are demonstrated in the movie by the characters' willingness to make tough decisions that advance their long-term goals and personal growth (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022).

The film's concluding scene, in which Cinta and Rangga are reconciled at the airport a liminal space associated with movement, departure, and future possibility further encodes this future-oriented value orientation. The airport as a setting connotes openness to change, new horizons, and individual mobility: a semiotic choice that aligns with American cultural values even as it is embedded in an Indonesian narrative.

Conclusion

This study used Robert Kohls' taxonomy of American values and Stuart Hall's representation theory to analyze how American values are portrayed in *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta* (2002). Through its narrative structure, characterization, dialogue, and visual elements, the film encodes a number of American values, including individualism, personal freedom, egalitarianism, informality, directness and honesty, and future orientation, as the descriptive qualitative analysis has shown.

These results add to a number of more general scholarly discussions. First, by illustrating the particular processes by which American value orientations are encoded in locally produced and consumed cultural texts, they reinforce and expand on previous research on cultural globalization in Indonesian cinema. The movie operates as what could be called a hybrid cultural text, negotiating between globally circulated (especially American) value systems and local Indonesian social norms to produce meanings that are neither strictly local nor strictly global but rather constitute both. The results confirm the effectiveness of integrating Kohls' taxonomy with Hall's representational framework for the study of national cinema. While Kohls' framework offers a methodical cultural vocabulary for recognizing and classifying the particular American values under investigation, Hall's encoding/decoding model offers a nuanced account of how values are inscribed in filmic texts and how audiences are positioned in relation to those inscriptions.

The study poses significant queries regarding popular cinema's ideological aspects and its function in the negotiation of cultural identity. *Ada Apa Dengan Cinta*'s remarkable commercial and cultural success in Indonesia while encoding distinctly American value orientations suggests that viewers engaged with the film's ideological content through a mediating framework of a uniquely Indonesian narrative and cultural context, rather than merely accepting or rejecting American values. Future studies could productively expand this analysis in a number of ways, such as by comparing AADC with its 2016 sequel to track changes in the representation of values over time, by analyzing the film's reception among Indonesian audiences to investigate the decoding practices of various demographic groups, or by placing the film within a larger comparative framework of Southeast Asian romantic cinema and its engagement with American cultural influences.

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