

Young Audience's Reception To Mars Romusha's Song "Barisan Pekerja" (1943)

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<p>Article History: Received September 25th 2023</p> <p>Revised February 26th 2024</p> <p>Accepted March 4th 2024</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>Japanese occupation in Indonesia, even though it was relatively short, gave a painful memory and left historical traces for Indonesian people nowadays. One of the historical trace of Japanese occupation in Indonesia that can be accessed again is song of romusha march "Barisan Pekerja" (1943). This research explores how today's young audiences reads the song of Romusha march "Barisan Pekerja" (1943) as uploaded on YouTube and its relevance to today's conditions. This research is a qualitative study that uses Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding theory and elaborated with the theory of political memory to see the meaning of that song from young audiences. From 8 informants, 3 people have an oppositional position, 4 people have a negotiated position and 1 person has a dominant-hegemonic position. The acceptance of each informant is inseparable from factors such as the framework of knowledge and ideology possessed, identity background, work and experience and access informants to the song. In addition, the collective memory they have - about the past, present and future - is also formed from education and the environment around the informant which contributes to the acceptance of young audiences.</p> <p>Keywords: <i>reception; young audience; marchromusha; Japanese occupation; collective memory</i></p> <p>ABSTRAK</p> <p>Masa pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia walaupun terbilang singkat, memberikan memori pilu dan meninggalkan jejak sejarah bagi bangsa Indonesia. Salah satu jejak sejarah dari masa pendudukan Jepang di Indonesia yang dapat diakses kembali adalah lagu Mars Romusha "Barisan Pekerja" (1943). Penelitian ini melihat bagaimana khalayak muda memaknai lagu mars romusha "Barisan Pekerja" (1943) sebagaimana diunggah di YouTube dan relevansinya dengan kondisi di masa kini. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif yang menggunakan teori encoding-decoding Stuart Hall dan dielaborasi dengan teori politik memori. Dari 8 informan, 3 orang berposisi oposisional, 4 orang berposisi negosiasi dan 1 orang berposisi dominan-hegemonik. Penerimaan masing-masing informan tidak terlepas dari faktor-faktor seperti kerangka pengetahuan dan ideologi yang dimiliki, latar belakang identitas, pekerjaan dan pengalaman serta akses saat menonton lagu tersebut. Selain itu, memori kolektif yang mereka miliki –tentang masa lalu, masa kini dan masa depan— juga dibentuk dari pendidikan dan lingkungan sekitar informan yang mewarnai penerimaan khalayak muda.</p> <p>Kata Kunci: <i>resepsi; khalayak muda; mars romusha; pendudukan Jepang; memori kolektif</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Even though the period of Japanese occupation was relatively short, this period made a big impression on the Indonesian people (Kasenda; 2015). The relatively short period of Japanese occupation also left many historical traces. One of the historical traces from the Japanese occupation in Indonesia that can be accessed

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again by today's young generation is the song Mars Romusha "Barisan Pekerja" (1943). This song has the original title "Bekerdja" which was featured in the Japanese propaganda film entitled "Barisan Pekerdja". However, the title 'Mars Romusha's Song "Barisan Pekerja" (1943)' is used in this research as a nomenclature with the intention of referring to the title given by the song uploader on the MbN Files YouTube channel which has been added with coloring and translated text from the old Indonesian spelling. The name "Mars Romusha Song" for this song is also more popular on the internet today.

The song was produced by Nippon Eiga Sha—one of the Japanese studios located below Keimin Bunka Shidoso (Japanese Cultural Center) and operates under supervision Sendenbu (Japan Propaganda Department). Talking about the Japanese Occupation period cannot be separated from talking about propaganda. Japan is aware of the importance of entertainment media such as films as a propaganda tool (Biran, 2009). Entertainment does provide an important mechanism for transmitting information about a society and its values (Miley and Read: 2021). Besides other themes - such as mutual cooperation in building the country and anti-Western allies - romusha became one of the themes often propagated by the Japanese military government for three consecutive years (1942, 1943, and 1945). One of the examples is like the content in the Mars song Romusha "Workers' March" (1943) was sung in Indonesian to invite people to work diligently and happily to build the country and destroy allies (Sofansyah, 2019). The message conveyed was very in line with the Japanese military mission at that time which wanted to exploit natural resources and human resources in Indonesia for Japan's interests in its work in the Greater East Asia war.

Several studies directly related to Romusha in Indonesia such as Kurasawa (1993) talk about studies on social change in rural Java, which highlights the mobilization of rural communities through local officials and the condition of Romusha in general. Then, Poeze's writing (2006), revealed that forced laborers from Java were used to build a railway from Bayah to Saketi for the purpose of transporting and excavating coal mines in Bayah, Banten, West Java.

Raben (2003), he discussed if the deployment of Romusha in eastern regions such as Celebes (Sulawesi), Moluccas (Maluku), New Guinea (Irian Jaya), and Borneo (Kalimantan) was carried out by utilizing local communities and people from Java. Another study discussed by Sato (2003) discusses the mobilization of Javanese people as Romusha, but for the sake of agriculture (planting rice) as a food supply for the Japanese army to fight with the Allies. Some of the research results and true stories confirm the occurrence of massive mass mobilization in almost all parts of Indonesia by the Japanese military government.

Aiko Kurasawa in her book *Japanese Power in Java* also explains if we talk about the Japanese occupation, then the events romusha is a terrible experience that is best remembered by Indonesian people (Kurasawa, 2015). There should be cognition for the Indonesian people regarding events romusha. M.Y. Biran (2009) also explains his personal experience that during the Japanese occupation the song Mars Romusha often played and taught in every school (Biran, 2009). So for the generation of that time, awareness of romusha deeply ingrained because of the propaganda that is

always presented to society. This is a reflection of the population's response in the past. What about the memories of today's young Indonesian generation?

Indonesia is currently the country facing the largest demographic bonus of 65.82 million people (Susenas Data, BPS 2022). Young people aged 16-30 years who belong to the Millennial (Y) and Z generations make up almost a quarter of Indonesia's total population. Youth have potential and are often considered to be great capital to realize national independence from various aspects (Hendarman, 2019). Based on this, it is important to pay attention to young people because of the responsibilities and roles they will carry out in the years to come. The characteristics of today's youth are very interesting because they are known to be creative, confident and easily connected to many things. This can also be seen from their closeness as media users, even Tapscott (in Hendarman, 2019) calls the youth of the millennial generation as Digital Generation (Hendarman, 2019). One of the main characteristics of this generation is the use of media and digital technology in various aspects of life even as a source of everyday information, including historical information, more specifically historyromusha.

According to Karl Mannheim (1952) as also quoted in Hendarman (2019), generation is a social construction in which there is a group of people who have the same age and history. Youth who have the same historical problems can become part of a generation and share experiences together (Mannheim, 1952). Based on the considerations above, the author sees the need to study and explore the memories of young people as the current generation regarding historical content from the Japanese occupation era which has been resurfaced on social media. Their meaning will not be separated from their respective work background, knowledge, cognition, socio-cultural conditions and ideology. Therefore, the subjects the author chose were young people aged 24-27 years from various professional and educational backgrounds who had watched the song Mars Romusha "Barisan Pekerja" (1943).

Starting from the background view above, the formulation of the problem to be raised are: (1) How the position of today's young audience interprets the Mars song Romusha "Workers' March" (1943) as uploaded on social media?; and (2) How is Mars' song relevant? Romusha "Worker's Line" (1943) what do the youth mean in today's context?

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative research methods are methods for exploring and understanding the meaning conveyed by individuals or groups of people from certain social problems or phenomena (Adapted from Cresswell, 19 2007). According to Moeloeng (2017), qualitative methods produce data in words and are methods that are more sensitive and flexible in their presentation structure (Moeloeng, 2017). In qualitative research, researchers are an important instrument for seeking meaning and research data. A reception approach is used in this research with a qualitative research method to find the position and meaning of the audience which is polysemous and does not aim at generalization.

Table 1. Informant Data

No	Informant's Initials	Age	Education	Jobs
1	MY	26	S1-Financial Management	Factory Employees & Entrepreneur
2	RB	26	D3-Midwifery	Midwife
3	ZA	26	S1-PGSD (Teacher Education Elementary school)	Non-Permanent Teacher
4	AKA	26	S1- Economic Education	Freelance Farmer
5	ARM	26	S1- History	Private Sector Employees
6	FN	26	S1- History Education	Teacher
7	IM	24	S2- History	Student
8	PD	27	Senior High School	Fisherman

Source: Researcher, 2023

This research took 8 young informants aged 24-27 years who belonged to the same generation but had different educational and work backgrounds. This age was chosen considering their understanding of history and experience in the world of work. There were several informants who conducted FGDs, such as history students and non-history students. Some others used the in-depth interview method because of the time difference when they wanted to meet the author. This research uses data analysis stages following research guidelines from Klaus Bruhn Jensen (2002) and Jensen (2011) to analyze the position of the younger generation's meaning of the content of the Mars song *Romusha* “Barisan Pekerja” (1943). The stages of data analysis according to Jensen are as follows: Data collection (*data collection*), Data analysis (*data analysis*), and Data interpretation (*data interpretation*).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Borrowing theoryencoding-decoding Stuart Hall, there are three positions offered in reading messages, namely dominant-hegemonic, negotiation and oppositional. This also does not forget several factors of meaning such as a framework of knowledge, relation of production, and technical infrastructure which mutually influence each other. The informants have the same age as a generation that is disconnected from events from *romusha* directly. The different backgrounds of the informants will at least influence how they make meaning.

Audience Reception Position

Audience reception theory has the basic assumption of an active audience. An active audience means they do not simply accept every meaning given to them and there is an effort to translate (decoding) the codes obtained. Audiences actively receive messages based on experiences or situations they have been through in the past.

Stuart Hall writes about theory "Encoding-Decoding" as a process of audiences consuming and producing meaning in receiving media content, which in this research is the consumption of Mars song content "Romusha" "Workers Row" (1943). Process encoding is the process of forming messages and decoding is the interpretation of the message by the audience. Code encoding and decoding not always perfectly symmetrical (Hall, 2006) and the three interpretation positions offered by Stuart Hall are as follows: Dominant-Hegemonic, Negotiation and Oppositional.

Dominant-Hegemonic is a position where the audience simply accepts the ideology of the content they consume without any rejection or disagreement. This position makes the audience accept the codes constructed by encoder. Negotiation is a position that explains the audience does not take it for granted but also does not reject it because it mixes its interpretation with the content received. This interpretation combines affirmation and opposition. Oppositional: When the audience really rejects the content they receive for various reasons. There is a possibility that when an audience understands both the literal and connotative code, they do not agree with the constructed discourse (Hall, 2006: 172). It is hoped that this theoretical framework can be a reference in looking at the various meanings of the younger generation towards the song Mars Romusha "Barisan Pekerja" (1943), according to the background of cognitive understanding, ideology, socio-political context, emotions and experiences of the selected work.

The author's data can show that the reception of informants is not uniform. At first, the informant's initial impression of the song was dominated by a negotiated reading because he did not immediately accept or reject the presence of the song's content. There were informants who saw it as a good work of art - as an interesting and new song, there were also those who saw it skeptically, especially asking why the video was made. For informants whose background was not a history major, the song was new to them and raised further questions.

Then in the next discussion, the author discusses how informants interpret the discourse of working continuously and happily as one of the values that Japan displays in the propaganda video. This discourse continues to develop to this day. There's even a term 'hustle culture' as a culture of continuous work with the illusion of achieving prosperity at the finish line. Almost like how Japan during its occupation ordered natives to work in order to achieve final victory. The informants who have various backgrounds in work activities interpret this by not forgetting their own experiences at work. There were informants who immediately rejected the content of the song, such as MY, or negotiated it by creating a new meaning, such as what PD said with 'Work should be enjoyable, but don't overdo it'.

"Ari sih emang bekerja mah harus dari hati jadi harus gembira gitu. Harus mensyukuri gitulah resep [suka]. Tapi kalau bekerja untuk orang lain terlalu over mah kayaknya enggak deh." (PD, May 8 2023).

Translation: "Ari indeed Work It has to come from the heart so it has to be happy. You have to be grateful for that recipe [Like]. But if you work for someone else too over mah maybeno way."

“Teu setuju na teh naon nya, seolah-olah kerja teh segalanya gening. Hayu bergembiralah. Hayu bekerja-bekerja. Di iming-iming kerja teh segalanya we ibaratkeunamah. Jadi prioritas. Jadi abimah teu setuju. Tapi kan mun diatas prioritas kan ada prioritas deui, ai nyanyian ieu mah seolah-olah ieu (kerja) teh nomer satu.... kan nepika ulah nopang dagu.. saking ku kudu fokusna kana kerjaan. Termasuk sekarang ge kayak gitu orang teh. Supaya kerja, aya kerja deui part kadua bahkan teu tidur, melupakan segalanya, demi naon? Duit! Abi teu setuju abi...” (MY, 26 April 2023)

Translation: He doesn't agree because of what, as if work is everything. Come on, have fun. Let's work work. In the lure of work, everything is like that. Work is a priority. I do not agree. But above that priority there are other priorities, and this song seems to be number one... (work is) right up to your chin because you have to focus because of work. Including people like that now too. In order to work, there is a second part of the work, you don't even sleep, you forget everything for what? Money! I do not agree... "

The author also takes the theme of the informant's acceptance of the propaganda that Japan put forward and the discourse about work shown in the video, namely farmer workers, factory workers and fishermen. This acceptance is also answered based on the identity of the informant who has the same job to date. PD, for example, says that fishing is indeed a job that must be remembered and preserved, or AKA agrees that farming is an important job that is really needed. Interestingly, MY responded to this with more negative sentiment towards factory workers. He even asked whether factory workers were a legacy from the colonial era, because working was like a life contract, where there was no freedom in working and were bound by many things that influenced their lives.

The reading position of the informants apparently changed, as at first MY was negotiating the content and the song then changed to being oppositional, completely rejecting the presence of the song in society. Meanwhile, AKA has a 'dominant-hegemonic' position but can be negotiated in some of the final discussions because they get additional information during the discussion. These changes, apart from being due to the conditions when the research began, are also inseparable from the current conditions of the informants in interpreting historical songs related to their activities and knowledge. How they carry out their activities, develop their mindset towards work and knowledge of history itself also shape the position of the informant.

(a) Oppositional Reading

In MY's oppositional position, ZA and RB were marked by skeptical questions and had negative sentiments towards the production of the song. Oppositional means the informant understands encoding (writing code) but reject it or read it in the opposite way (Barker, 2004). Several things that influenced informants in their positions were: (1) negative sentiments towards colonialism and colonialism that they had learned at school, (2) sympathy for workers

romusha in the past, (3) remembering current experiences as workers who are not comfortable in terms of time, wage discrepancies and large workloads, (4) fear of the return of colonialism from foreign nations, (5) information obtained from the surrounding environment, and things -other things that are in accordance with the identity of each informant.

(b) Dominant-hegemonic reading

Meanwhile, AKA's dominant-hegemonic position begins with a positive attitude of acceptance towards songs as something that is 'neutral' and stands for art. On theory encoding-decoding Stuart Hall, the definition of dominant-hegemonic reading is that reading accepts the meaning desired by the creator without rejection (Barker, 2004). Several reasons the informant is in a dominant-hegemonic position are: (1) there is a match between the song and the message received from the march song romusha,(2) see the benefits of the presence of this song which creates enthusiasm and motivation, (3) want to find out more about the history of the Japanese Occupation and romusha so that it does not limit the possibility of the song being presented, (4) the conditions surrounding the informant are supportive and other things are in accordance with the identity of the informant.

(c) Negotiation Reading

As for the negotiation position, by informants ARM, IM, FN and PD the author saw several factors that combined acceptance and rejection. The negotiation reading acknowledges the existence of a hegemonic code but makes its own rules or adaptations based on certain conditions (Barker, 2004), such as: (1) Adopting part of the march song romusha to be able to take advantage of it in the present, (2) want to preserve something contained in the song, (3) refuse to have to completely submit to the message of the song, (4) redefine several things according to their interpretation, (5) present new things which are not shown in the song video, and other matters related to the identity of the informant

Reception and Collective Memory

In general, Duncan Bell (2006:2) suggests that memory refers to the process or ability by which events or impressions from the past are recalled and preserved. A person's memory cannot be separated from collective memory, and collective memory is also inseparable from the memory of each individual. In this assumption, memory is something that is socially constructed and is contextual and particular (Budiawan, 2013)

History is not an objective concept per se, but in it contains concepts and spaces critical of the narrative, plot and characterization. These critical spaces, unfortunately, have long been victims of social dynamics that deprive them of content and concepts about history itself. This lost space gives birth to social

amnesia, which then gives birth to pseudo-historical consciousness. Social amnesia is a term coined to remember what is lost in people's collective memory. "Social amnesia" is society's collective repression of memories of the past (Jacoby, 1975). Social amnesia is the result of forced repression of memory. Social amnesia can be countered by "memory politics".

The politics of memory presents history as a frozen and closed portrait, yet to be "institutionalized knowledge" and believed by many. Memory politics is a tool used to record, remember or edit and construct an earlier version of historical facts: omitted, obscured, and hidden (Nasrallah, 2005). The role and function of this politics of memory is to devise a collective strategy of how objective truth and memory can be revived. This memory politics seeks to uphold justice and restore the rights of victims who were previously ignored and oppressed. Working memory is influenced by political and cultural forces. Government policies, social rules, popular culture, social norms affect how situations are remembered. The politics of memory is used to counter fascism of a certain group of peoples, who in the name of the "grand narrative" make others minor and inferior entities, namely "Others". Fighting social amnesia is an important matter of the health of a civilization, because those who forget the evils of the past, will usually repeat the crimes in the future. Memory politics needs to be built, because it serves to rehabilitate and seek reconciliation in post-conflict situations. In fact, the internal conflicts that were so cruel in the past can be cured by memory politics. Thus, history is written by victors, no longer applicable, to a healthy civilization. Germany is one example of a country that writes history by reviving memorializations, namely establishing memorialization sites, both in physical and non-physical form. Physical, such as monuments, museums, and others. Non-physical, for example: writing history objectively and acknowledging others, writing literary books, filmmaking, teaching history in school and university curricula, and others. The theory that a great country is a great state is refuted by this one example. A great country, is a country that acknowledges its defects and sins in the past.

Memory is defined as a dynamic entity that can be recreated in dialogue with political, social, and cultural forces. Politicians often use a collective understanding of the past to mobilize memory as a political instrument for the present. In certain cases, they use the past strategically and manipulate memories to legitimize their actions by referring to formative events in the collective consciousness of the community.

Collective memory is generally narrated through various means using a variety of instruments, both through persuasive and coercive actions. Such actions, commonly referred to as nationalism projects, are carried out to make citizens still have their nationalistic side, in addition to the formation of a common awareness of the collective memory that has been selected. Various reconstructions and reproductions of these events later became the subject of study of memory.

Memory problems often touch on sensitive topics related to national and ethnic identity, foreign policy, post-conflict reconstruction, trauma from authoritarian regimes, and violations of human rights. These human rights violations typically include violence, genocide, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and chauvinism resulting in trauma and dark historical wounds. In Indonesia, memory studies relate to the trauma of the events of 65, GAM Aceh, East Timor, the events of 98, interethnic conflicts, and various repressions of the New Order legacy.

Historical archives can be considered as an introduction to memories for the younger generation, which are ultimately ambivalent because they can open up alternative points of view in looking at the past. Budiawan (2013) also wrote that "in the politics of memory, the main concern is not what happened in the past but how the past is remembered" (Budiawan, 2013). What are you remembering and forgetting about events in the past? How does today's young generation interpret events in the past? The meaning of past events can be conveyed by young audiences today regarding historical events that they did not experience with the construction of the memories they have.

Collective memory or what Halbwachs (1992) mentioned as a mixture of past experiences, present needs and future hopes (Halbwachs in Wattimena (2009) – also influences informants' production of meaning about the Japanese Occupation period. So it is not just individual experiences that shape meaning positions. The period of Japanese cruelty, with symbolic events *romusha* passed on to today's younger generation through education and narratives about his brutality. As a united nation, they share the pain and suffering in the past that is linked to the pain of the present and their hopes for the future, by watching the video of the *Mars song romusha*. The memory of fear and hatred towards the colonialists was inherited and had a particular impact on MY, ZA, and RB and was expressed in their behavior regarding perceived injustice, as was also reflected in how they refused to present the song to society again. They have hope that events will occur *romusha* doesn't happen again.

Then for ARM, IM, and FN as a discussion group from the History department, they took the perspective that the Indonesian people also fought back rather than just playing the role of silent victims during the colonial period. Memories of Japanese atrocities and hatred do not seem to dominate, in fact their meaning is more about the movement and resistance carried out by the Indonesian people. ARM in particular looks more at past events for current needs, for example considering that the song can be studied for propaganda techniques or FN and IM who look at past events can be studied as education for the younger generation to understand government policies at that time.

Meanwhile, for PD and AKA, the song evokes their identity as emerging workers, in accordance with their current activities. Raising the hope of PD and AKA so that the work they do today will continue to be remembered and become more prosperous.

Table 2. Informant Position Data

No	Infor- mant's Initials	First Impressions	Work hard and be happy	Indigenous Workers Construction	Japanese propaganda	Song Representation	Overall Meaningful Position
1	MY	Negotiation	Oppositional	Negotiation	Oppositional	Oppositional	Oppositional
2	RB	Negotiation	Oppositional	-	Oppositional	Oppositional	Oppositional
3	ZA	Oppositional	Negotiation	-	Oppositional	Oppositional	Oppositional
4	AKA	Dominant- Hegemonic	Dominant- Hegemonic	Dominant- Hegemonic	-	Negotiation	Dominant- Hegemonic
5	ARM	Negotiation	-	-	Negotiation	Negotiation	Negotiation
6	FN	Negotiation	-	-	-	Negotiation	Negotiation
7	IM	Negotiation	-	Dominant- Hegemonic	Negotiation	Negotiation	Negotiation
8	PD	Negotiation	Negotiation	Dominant- Hegemonic	-	Negotiation	Negotiation

Source: Researcher, 2023

CONCLUSION

The presence of the marching song romusha into the midst of today's young generation can be a bridge for them to remember the past, although from different points of view. Reading history makes it impossible to know for sure what happened completely, especially for today's young generation who did not experience these events directly. Based on the data obtained, from 8 informants, the author categorized 3 people in an oppositional position, 4 people in a negotiation position and 1 person in a dominant hegemonic position.

Acceptance cannot be separated from factors such as the informant's knowledge and ideology framework, identity background, work and experience as well as access when watching the song. In this research in particular, their memories of the history of the Japanese Occupation - which were formed during this time - also influenced how they interpreted the presence of the march song romusha. Hence, the presence of the marching song romusha It must also be re-examined in whose interests and whose interests it is. Is there an indication of repeating the past by spreading values that are appropriate for the present, or is its presence limited to an archive of historical traces so that the younger generation does not forget this event?

Acceptance by young audiences is also inseparable from the collective memory they have which is formed from education and the surrounding environment. Memories of the atrocities of the Japanese Occupation period continue to be passed down, giving rise to negative sentiments and strong ties as a nation experienced by several informants. Several informants saw it for the present - and adapted the song to present needs, such as national defense or improving the quality of art. Some informants saw the relevance of the march song romusha based on their uncomfortable work experience, so they are afraid romusha will be back.

All of the informants' answers provide a new perspective that when looking at a trace of history, which the person has not experienced directly, it will be interpreted based on a building of information and experience that is close to what the video is trying to show. Mars song romusha This can be in accordance with the informants' current conditions (as workers, students or teachers), their past experiences (as workers and students) or their hopes in the future for the Indonesian nation and their work activities (Indonesia is increasingly advanced, and working prosperous people).

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