

***Kidungan* in Virtual *Ludruk* as a Medium for Narrating the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic and Promoting Health Protocols in Indonesia**

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ABSTRACT

From various perspectives, many researchers have studied *ludruk*, a traditional folk play originating from East Java Indonesia. However, there has not been any study focusing on how *ludruk* responds to the COVID-19 pandemic. This article examines how *kidungan* (song in *ludruk* that has poetical structure and transmits valuable messages) in *ludruk* virtual articulates the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and promotes health protocols in Indonesia. It also investigates how *kidungan* is used as a medium to convey religious values to people facing those terrible effects. The method used in this research is qualitative research that focuses on textual and contextual analysis on *kidungan* presented by two *ludruk* troupes, namely Karya Budaya from Mojokerto and Armada from Malang, that held the show virtually in February and April 2021 on YouTube. The analysis indicates that *ludruk* Karya Budaya and *ludruk* Armada presented *kidungan* to depict the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic, especially on low-class people, and to convey the advice to comply with health protocols to avoid the spread of the Coronavirus. It also represents a religious belief in dealing with the virus, reminding people to pray to God so that the COVID-19 pandemic will vanish.

Keywords: *Kidungan, COVID-19 pandemic, socio-economic impacts, virtual ludruk*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ludruk, a cultural heritage of East Java and a traditional art (Sutarto, 2009), has encountered problems since the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The artists of *ludruk* have not been able to perform on the stage wherein the spectators can enjoy their performance directly. This situation is due to the Indonesian government that has applied lockdown and social distancing policy to prevent people from being infected by coronavirus. As a result, the performing arts which provide space for spectators to gather in front the stage are prohibited. *Ludruk* performers and spectators have no opportunity to socialize through face-to-face meetings.

During the pandemic, the arts and artists are required to adjust to their creation and performance (Buchholz, Fine, & Wohl, 2020). The adaptation made by *ludruk* is transforming the conventional show into virtual performance. In this show, the relation between *ludruk* artists and spectators are intermediated through digital technology. In this context, performance space which is considered important (Simatupang, 2013) has been replaced by virtual space. The shift from the physical to

virtual show is one of the ways to adapt to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Since the post-new order, performing arts in Indonesia has adjusted to technology and global cultures (Hatley, 2014). The traditional performing arts, such as *ludruk* had used technology, but this technology mainly was for recording, which was then played back on the radio, on YouTube, and on tape recorders (Supriyanto, 2018). Nowadays, several *ludruk* performances in East Java Indonesia are performed virtually via YouTube. The show is still held on stage, but not attended by the audience. However, this virtual show can be watched by wide audiences.

The government, through the East Java Art Committee has supported *ludruk* by conducting a program, namely *ludruk* virtual. This aid is in line with the expectations of the chairman of *ludruk* Karya Budaya Mojokerto, who said that it is time for the government to raise *ludruk* as the identity of the cultural heritage of East Java (Susanto, 2014). The *ludruk* virtual program gives *ludruk* troupes facilities to perform virtually and support the finance.

Ludruk explores the actual theme of the COVID-19 pandemic through *kidungan*. The word *kidung* denotes 'song' or 'singing' whose lyrics are in the form of poetry and sung with traditional musical instruments (Supriyanto, 2004). Therefore, *kidungan* could play an enthralling medium in telling a phenomenon and conveying a message to the audience. Supriyanto (2018) asserts that one of the functions of *ludruk* performance is as a medium of education for society and development. Therefore, these two functions will play a paramount role during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and *kidungan* can educate people to be aware of the pandemic dangerous impact, becoming a medium for promoting the government program to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ludruk performances have a nexus with life phenomena and describe the experiences of its players and audiences (Peacock, 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic that is faced by everyone, including actors and *ludruk* audiences, can thus be an essential source in the lyrics of *kidungan*. Song singers, as well as audiences, are experiencing a pandemic. Therefore, the experiences of the *ludruk* actors and people during the pandemic become inspirations of the *ludruk* performance in the pandemic era.

Research on *kidungan* in *ludruk*, which pertains to socio-cultural impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and health protocols, has not been found so far. Previous studies on *ludruk* art, as carried out by Rachmasari and Permatasari (2020) focused on scrutinizing the relationship between *ludruk* and the audience, whereas Kholidah, Widodo, and Saddhono (2020) examined *ludruk* as a medium for social criticism. Meanwhile, humor in *ludruk* was analyzed by Kumuda and Wrihatni (2018). Previously, Setiawan and Sutarto (2014) had also researched the creativity of *ludruk*. This study seeks to fill the research gap by scrutinizing how *kidungan* in *ludruk* which is held virtually depicts the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic and promote health protocols in Indonesia. Moreover, it also examines how *kidungan* articulates religious advice to people to face the pandemic.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative. It uses textual and contextual analysis. Textual analysis of the lyrics of the *kidungan* in the *ludruk* performance is carried out along with contextual analysis, which according to Soedarsono (1999), interweaves with the way how arts performance is investigated in the contexts of culture, society, economics, and other fields. As the lyrics of *kidungan* narrate the COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis of how the lyrics reflect the society's condition is vital. The data collection was carried out by watching virtual *ludruk* performances on YouTube and then transcribing the *kidungan* lyrics sung by *ludruk* performers in the video. The descriptive analysis, in this research, is

"summarizing and organizing data" and then followed by the interpretation, which pertains to "finding or making meaning" (Cho & Trent, 2014). Finally, the lyrics of *kidungan* are analyzed based on their contexts related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lyrics of *kidungan* are taken from the two troupes of *ludruk* namely Karya Budaya from Mojokerto East Java and Armada from Malang East Java, that perform virtual shows on YouTube. The selection of this object was based on the adaptation made by these two groups in using virtual technology and bring the theme of COVID-19 pandemic in their *kidungan*. Moreover, these two *ludruk* groups have been popular and are often invited to perform in festivals, society's ceremonies and government programs. Wardhani (2019) explained that *Ludruk* Karya Budaya is a productive *ludruk* troupe and has been active in the performing arts since 1969. Meanwhile, *Ludruk* Armada, until April 2021, continue to conduct performances even though it is through virtual media.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Kidungan performed by the artists of *Ludruk* Karya Budaya Mojokerto and *Ludruk* Armada Malang narrates the phenomena of pandemic-Covid 19. The theme of *kidungan* reflects the *ludruk* artists whose lives have been affected by the pandemic. Therefore, the lyrics of *kidungan* represent the social phenomenon. In the lyrics, the artists describe the socio-economic impacts of pandemic. Moreover, the *kidungan* lyrics also embody a message for the spectators to comply with health protocols. In addition, the artists also highlight the importance of religious values in facing the impacts of the pandemic.

3.1. *Kidungan* as a Medium for Narrating the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Coronavirus has brought significant impacts on all facets of life. People from all social classes have endured the hardship of living in the Pandemic. Among the people affected by pandemic, those from the low class face the most terrible situation. *Ludruk*, in its performance, always represents the life of ordinary people. The struggle of low-class people become the prominent feature of *ludruk* narrative (Azali, 2012). Low-class people are the most vulnerable since they do not have good social resilience. They work in manufacturing, tourism, service, and trade and find the hard life due to layoffs and the loss of profit.

Some ordinary people who encounter hard life during pandemic are the artists of traditional arts, including *ludruk*, since they cannot carry out the performance in the pandemic. Most *ludruk* performers have social backgrounds as owners of lands and farming labor,

employees with a lower position in the company, village bureaucrat, civil servants, and army (Supriyanto, 2018; Hatley, 1971). From this description, it can be pointed out that *ludruk* artists are not from high-class stratification.

Because of the government policy of social distancing and lockdown, the *ludruk* artists cannot play on the stage to entertain the spectators. On a normal day, there are some contracts of the show that allow the artists to earn money. Unfortunately, the pandemic prevents them from conducting live performances with the audiences in a particular place. Here are the lyrics.

*Suwe gak nok tanggapan, seniman podo kebingungan
Kanggo nyukupi kebutuhan nganti ono utange nganti sak
pirang-pirang
Wabah corona suk kapan bisa mari?*

....
*gak nyambut gawe tapi mikir saben bengi
mergo ben dino prei, akhire rak digaji*
[There was no show for a long time, all artists felt confused
To afford the basic needs, they owe a lot, a lot
When will this corona pandemic end?

....
I do not have a job but keep thinking every night
Because there is no show, they do not have income]

Tanggapan in the above *kidungan* lyrics means the invitation for the *ludruk* artists to conduct the show in the wedding party, art festivals, and celebrations. Usually, *ludruk* artists will visit the place where spectators will watch their performance. However, during the social distancing policy, the government prohibits people from making a crowd. Consequently, the *ludruk* artists lose their income from the live show in front of the spectators. They are confused because they need money to afford basic needs. Some *ludruk* artists depend on fees for their involvement in performances. For a *ludruk* artist who has no other skills other than playing in performing art, it will be difficult for him to find another job. Those who have no savings must find a loan. As a result, they are in much debt. The phrase *sak pirang-pirang* means abundance. As the artist repeated the message twice, it can be concluded that they are in an insecure situation due to the tremendous debt.

Lack of opportunities and prohibitions for *ludruk* artists to attend performance invitations in front of the audience makes them unable to have social relations with the audience. This condition certainly reduces traditional art performances' essence, emphasizing the close relationship between the performer and the audience. Furthermore, the absence of opportunities to visit villages or regions to hold live performances also prevents *ludruk* players from meeting and interacting with the community. Socially, they will not be able to face to face conversation with the audiences directly.

The players of *ludruk* usually get paid every time there is a show. However, they do not gain a monthly salary, so they rely on honorariums when involved in the

show. In each performance, the players will be paid by the *ludruk* leader according to their respective roles. *Ludruk* leaders gain money from individuals or the government who invite them to perform plays.

Because *ludruk* artists cannot perform during the pandemic, they must rely on other people financially. Male *kidungan* singers, if they are the head of the family who pays for his wife and children's living allowance, he will be confused. He will be lucky if his wife also works because he can rely on his wife's income for the time being. The following lyrics by *Ludruk* Armada strengthen this terrible condition.

*Rujak timun diwadahi mangkok
Gak manggung setahun melu mangan wong wedok*
[Cucumber salad is put in the bowl
Because there is no show for a year, I rely my life on my wife].

A husband who depends on his life to the wife will become a weak figure in the family. However, as narrated in the above lyrics, the artist has no choice as he can no longer generate money. Moreover, his artistic competence cannot be applied as the performing arts show is forbidden during COVID-19 pandemic. This situation can undermine the stability of the family. As a husband, the *ludruk* artist should be able to provide for the family's needs. If he has many children, then there will be many basic needs that must be met. *Ludruk* artist can experience mental stress if he continues to be unemployed.

In addition, *kidungan* also tells of the impact of the pandemic on low-class people. The *ludruk* actors, especially the *kidungan* singers, try to represent their lives in the lyrics.

*Ning stasiun numpak ojekan
Ngombe kolak sarapane ketan*
Tak itung wis setahun dulur ora enthuk tanggapan
Rasane awak koyok digebugin setan
[Going to the station by ride
Drinking *kolak*, eating sticky rice
I count it has been a year there is no show
I feel my body as if beaten by Satan]

The lyrics above show that the singer is not from high class because he takes public transportation instead of driving a private car. The breakfast that he has is also tiny and traditional. That kind of food is not expensive. His condition gets worse as he has not got a show for a year. His utterance that tells how his body feels also indicates that pandemic has severely affected his life. By saying that his body was like being beaten by a demon during the pandemic, the artist wanted to convey to the audience that his life was hard and painful. Satan in this context can be interpreted as COVID-19 which continues to infect people on earth.

Kidungan also depicts how low-class people attempt to survive in pandemic. Despite relying on social

security, the artists show creativity as portrayed in this lyric. “*Aku dewe yo keno imbase setahun iki ora nyambut gawe. Direwangi gawe udeng sing penting ono asile*” [“I get the impact of the pandemic; I have not got a job for a year. I make *udeng* to earn for a living”]. This excerpt delineates how the artist tries to survive by being a maker of *udeng*, a traditional headdress that the *ludruk* artist usually wears. His entrepreneurial attempts to make *udeng* indicate that he loves *ludruk* and wants to create an artistic product that interweaves with *ludruk*. As an artist, he seems to preserve his artistic soul. Even if he must earn money outside of his role as a *ludruk* artist, he still wants to do work related to art.

3.2. *Kidungan as Medium for Promoting Health Protocols*

One of the suggestions from the Indonesian government to people in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic is to follow health protocols. The government provides information to the public through various mediums such as writing on social media, on the roadside, television, and mass media. *In addition*, *Ludruk*, as a traditional performing art with many fans, will play a vital role in promoting health protocols.

As an Indonesian citizen, artist *ludruk* must become a role model on the stage in complying with the health protocol recommendations. That is why during the show, when the *ludruk* artist sings the *kidungan* lyrics, he wears a face shield to protect himself from COVID-19. Meanwhile, through messages about the importance of health protocols conveyed through *kidungan*, *ludruk* artist has supported the government in dealing with pandemic issues and want to express their voices in promoting health protocols through *kidungan*.

Kidungan uses simple Eastern Javanese language that the spectators of *ludruk* also speak. By using such language, the message that will be delivered to audiences will be easily understood. Moreover, the singer uses the language that tends to produce denotative meanings. In the following lyrics of *kidungan*, the singer directly promotes the health protocols by advising people not to go out from the house because they can get infected. In a pandemic situation, gathering and meeting other people is dangerous because it can be a medium for spreading the virus. Here is *kidungan* presented by *ludruk* Armada Malang which held a virtual show on YouTube on April 5, 2021.

*Tuku semongko nang bedake Markonah
Tuku tahu lewat pasar tengah
Uwong sak dunyo umek perkoro corona
Mulo soko iku dulur ojok metu tekan omah
Ayo bareng-bareng njogo kesehatan kita...*

*Distancing iku dulur lak sebutane
Aku dewe gak negeri artine
Tapi aku paham opo maksute
Gak oleh cedek-cedek karo sopo ae*

[Buy watermelon at Markonah's stall.
Buy tofu through the central market)
People around the world worry
about Coronavirus
So, brother, please don't leave your house
Let us take care of our health

Distancing is what people call
I do not know its literal meaning
But I know what it means
I must not be near to anyone]

In the lyrics of *kidungan* above, the singer mentions the word ‘distancing’, which he does not know the meaning, because it is in English. However, the singer explains health protocols to the audience in easy language. He conveys the meaning of ‘distancing’ as a prohibition to be close to one another.

Some English terms related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as ‘social distancing’ and ‘lockdown’ in Indonesia, can confuse people who do not know English. To deliver the meaning of the English terms to ordinary people, the role of the traditional performing arts, such as *ludruk*, is crucial. The artist who delivers *kidungan* above represents people who do not know the meaning of English terms. Therefore, the explanation of the English terms in *kidungan* as shown by the *ludruk* artist, become an effective way in promoting health protocols for low-class people.

3.3. *Kidungan as Medium for Instilling Religious Values in Facing the Pandemic Impacts*

Kidungan of *ludruk* performance as a response to COVID-19 Pandemic also narrates the spiritual principles of the artist. There are religious values within *Kidungan* lyrics presented by the artist of *ludruk* Armada below. He tells how people must be patient in facing the pandemic. Religion teaches the values of patience when someone experiences suffering, disaster, and calamity. Through the lyric below, the artist also persuades people to pray to God so that COVID-19 will disappear.

*Tapi aku saiki wis sadar
Kabeh tak trimo kanthi ati sabar
Dulur-dulur kabeh kudu sing sabar
Ayo duno marang Gusti supaya Coronane ambyar*
[But I now realize
I must accept everything with patience
Brothers, you have to be patient
Let us pray to God that COVID-19 will go away]

The emphasis on prayer and hoping for God's help in dealing with the pandemic seems that people negate efforts in science, especially medicine. For example, in the lyrics of *kidungan*, the *ludruk* artist does not mention medical efforts to cope with COVID-19. This phenomenon may be due to deeply rooted religious values in society, especially where the artists live.

Moreover, such an attitude toward the pandemic can result from the public perception that the medical attempts have not tamed the virus, so people need to hope in another great power, namely God.

The powerlessness of human beings is often seen when they face various catastrophic natural disasters, such as floods, landslides, earthquakes, and plagues. In these helpless situations, people are often aware of what they have done to cause natural disasters. Through these natural disasters, humans will be aware of their various actions in exploiting and destroying nature. However, the lyrics of *kidungan* presented by *ludruk* Karya Budaya on February 25, 2021, below describe natural disasters and epidemics without conveying an explicit or implicit message to the audience.

*Peristiwa alam pancen sering terjadi
Bencana alam lan musibah silih berganti
Tanah longsor, dulur, banjir lan tsunami
Wabah penyakit mengguncang permukaan bumi*
[Natural disaster indeed often happens
They come one by one
Landslide, flood and Tsunami
Pandemic shakes the earth]

In disasters and calamities that have not yet disappeared, humans are often powerless to deal with them. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens people's lives. Amid this feeling of helplessness, religious values are disseminated through *kidungan*. People still believe in the power of God. They hope that God can eliminate the plague.

*Muga Gusti paring wusada wabah corona enggal sirno
Indonesia kaliso ing sambikolo ayem tentrem selaminyo*
[Hopefully God will make coronavirus vanish
Indonesia turns to be peaceful forever]

The lyrics of *kidungan* delivered by the *ludruk* artists contains a prayer. There is hope that COVID-19 will vanish in the lyrics above, and Indonesia's country will be safe and peaceful forever. By mentioning Indonesia, the artists realize that pandemic is not a personal problem, but a country's concern. COVID-19 has caused people to live in anxiety, panic, and even fear. They became suspicious of each other for fear of being infected with a virus that people might carry. Indonesia as a nation is far from being peaceful and safe. Therefore, the songwriter hopes that Indonesia will return to being safe and peaceful as before. From the lyrics, it can be also figured out that *kidungan* is used by *ludruk* artists to convey prayers and hopes. By so doing, the artists implicitly invite the audience to pray as well.

4. CONCLUSION

Ludruk Karya Budaya and *Ludruk Armada*, which present virtual shows on YouTube with government support, have adapted the show technologically and used them to respond to the pandemic situation. Through

kidungan, the *ludruk* artists tell stories about the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and promote health protocols and the importance of religious values in dealing with the pandemic. In addition, *Kidungan* is also used to spread religious values so that people will be aware of God's power.

Through *kidungan* in virtual *ludruk*, various social-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by *ludruk* artists and other lower-class people are disclosed. They lost their jobs and cannot conduct the show regularly. Consequently, they have to rely on the help of other people. Meanwhile, the instruction to follow health protocols is conveyed in simple language that is easy to understand. The use of English terms about pandemics used by the government is explained through *kidungan* by *ludruk* artists. Religious values in the song that emphasize God's power in solving the pandemic can be positive energy that can prevent people from despair due to relying too much on human beings' attempts.

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