



# Cultural Identity in Choral Performance Through Digital Media

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**Abstract.** This research was conducted to understand the cultural identity in one of the Papuans (Papua – Indonesia) folksongs, i.e. *Yamko Rambe Yamko*, at one of Choir Festival. The aim of this study was to understand the use of cultural character in the performance of *Yamko Rambe Yamko* as well as the relationship between the choir performance and the cultural identity of the choir. The method used in this study is a qualitative method with an performance ethnographic approach to that combines musical aspects and non-musical elements. Data collection techniques were carried out through preliminary studies, music analysis, and video analysis. The findings revealed that the local styles in the performance of *Yamko Rambe Yamko* can be seen in the musical ornaments, choreography, as well as costumes and props from Papuans cultures. The cultural identity in the performance of *Yamko Rambe Yamko* reflects the traditional dances and the spirit character found in Papuans society. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that in performing *Yamko Rambe Yamko* at Choir Festival, the choir group not only shows the uniqueness of the cultural character of Papuans as a part of Indonesian cultural diversity, both musically and non-musically, but also becomes a ‘cultural ambassador’ who emphasizes their national identity.

**Keywords:** Arrangement · Cultural Identity · Choir

## 1 Introduction

Currently, the appreciation of art, especially music in digital media, is already a daily public activity. In fact, almost every musical performance has good documentation from all aspects. Martin Lister states that new media has several characteristics, namely digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networking, and simulation [1]. Even in the theory of uses and gratifications, the motives of users in utilizing internet media as a new communication medium to meet the needs of information, entertainment and personal identity have also been implemented. According to Sukiman, the characteristics of media used in teaching and learning activities are divided into visual-based learning media, audio-based learning media, audio-visual based learning media and computer-based learning media [2].

In recent years, choir festivals have increasingly involved folksong category. It is not surprising that more and more choral groups have appeared, in the categories of children, adolescents, and adults, and have participated in festivals. More interestingly,

there are many festivals, both national and international, that also involve the category of folksong from any of the cultures of the participating countries.

As a result, many choral groups were stimulated to make certain improvements in their performance, especially when singing folksong. Their performance at the festival not only shows their ability to sing folksong arrangements, but also performs movements and uses costumes and props that support the theme of the folksong sung. In other words, the performance of a choral group in a choral festival involves not only musical, but also non-musical aspects, such as choreography and other artistic idea.

Creative ideas associated with musical performances include the naming of choral groups, performances, and choreography. A choir conductor can decide what aspects the choir group needs. Generally, many choral groups choose to include non-musical aspects of their musical performances, such as movement or choreography as well as costumes and props. Not infrequently, many choirs today start collaborating with other parties to prepare for participation in international festivals, such as choreographers and costumers. The existence of this non-musical component is seen as being able to improve the quality of choral performances and the appreciation of the international community [3].

Not only active in domestic festivals, there are several choir groups in Indonesia that have achievements in prestigious international festivals. At the children's level, there are several choirs, one of which is The Resonanz Children Choir (TRCC). One of the factors that determined TRCC's achievements at the international level was their ability to present folksong arranged in a cultural characteristic.

A series of folksong that have been sung in choir festival include *Yamko Rambe Yamko* (arranged by Agustinus Bambang Jusana) as one of the songs sung by TRCC which managed to become the Grand Prix Champion in the Musica Eterna Roma International Festival & Competition 2017 - Grand Prix Competition in Rome, Italy. In addition, TRCC also won in the Children's Choir category and the Gospel and Spirituals category. The uniqueness of this group is their totality in the performance, in particular the non-musical aspect, which is seen as having its own uniqueness for European society, especially Italy.

Non-musically, the creative ideas in the performance of the TRCC is seen in the use of movements or choreography as well as costumes and props that reflect the culture of a particular society in Indonesia. TRCC use that idea to resemble movements as well as costumes and props that appear in traditional dances of the Papuans, such as the Sajojo Dance. But different from non-musical creative ideas, the musical aspects produced by this choral group provide a different 'uniqueness' because the cultural identity in the musical arrangement is only a sound that is poorly understood by the general international community. Departing from the general lack of understanding of the international community towards these musical aspects, this research focuses on the musical aspects in the arrangement of folksong with the title Cultural Identity in Choir Performance Through Digital Media, especially in the arrangement of the song *Yamko Rambe Yamko* (arranged by Agustinus Bambang Jusana) represented by TRCC.

## 2 Literature Review

One of the media research traditions that until now is quite popular among researchers is research on media use, which refers to the theory of uses-and gratifications (U&G). Unlike other media effects theories that focus on what the media does to the audience and consider media users to be homogeneous, U&G theory pays more attention to what the audience does to the media as a form of individual behavior as an active audience.

The U&G theory was originally developed by Katz and Gurevic from the “Mass Media Uses and Gratification Model” which was published for the first time in 1974. This theory appeared at a time when television technology was developing around the 1960s [4]. Media theorists are interested in the choices made by audiences in consuming media messages. The assumption of this theory is that the audience is active in meeting its needs and impulses. This theory belongs to the socio-psychological tradition that understands communication as an interpersonal influence.

There are several studies that link between folk songs and the culture of a society. Pohjola has suggested that there is a renewed interest in folk music around the world, e.g. folk music ‘expresses the essence of a culture’; Folk music forms the image of culture, or gives the impression of culture, and touches human emotions. These experiences provide an opportunity to accept difference and diversity in human life. Aswegen and Potgieter in their research on children’s choirs concluded that folk music or folksong in the choir repertoire has important benefits, especially for bridging cultural differences. Children in the choir, conductors and songwriters involved, as well as the audience can be positively influenced by folk music performances from various cultural groups. The folk songs in choral performances generally use the native language of the region from which the song originated. Meerholz and Spaumer explain that the proper pronunciation of the text plays an important role when performing folk songs in their native language and reflects the choir’s respect for a particular cultural group. In addition to the text in the original language, the choir manager must also consider other non-musical components, such as choreography, in the choral performance. Therefore, it is highly recommended that each choir group have several instructors who know the folksong culture to assist the choral group in their performance at the international choral festival [5].

There is some research on the benefits of non-musical aspects in the performance of choral groups at international festivals. Green explained that the presence of a non-musical component can improve the quality of choral performances. Some researchers have even concluded that choirs are seen as having a variety of roles, including demonstrating the cultural diversity of a country’s music and asserting the country’s national identity [6]. Wolfe Jr. in his research on choral performances in Kingston, Jamaica, concluded that despite the performances, the choir members indicated their role as cultural ambassadors for Jamaica and the entire Caribbean region. The performance of this choral group involves the use of lighting, instrumentation, stage setting, costumes, and movements [7]. Acker and Nyland in their articles demonstrate the contribution of their thinking to certain interdisciplinary genres by contextualizing and describing the famous Serbian children’s choir that performed in the Belgrade Orthodox Cathedral (Saborna Crkva). In this article, Acker and Nyland conclude that there is an exploration of musical culture, community, and identity. They used the concept of Vygotskian *Perezhivane* to

link children's emotional experiences with adult culture and history to explain why participation in children's choirs has such an important role in cultural learning and identity formation [8].

### 3 Methods

The method used in this study is the qualitative method [9]. This research uses an ethnographic approach to performances that combines text and other visual elements, such as choreography, costumes, and props. The ethnographic approach of performance is used because the creative ideas presented by choral groups in festivals at the international level constitute a collaboration between musical and non-musical aspects, involving not only music, but also movements or choreography as well as costumes and props. The purpose of this study was to understand the cultural identity from TRCC performance in *Yamko Rambe Yamko's* arrangement at choir festival as well as the relationship between this choir performance and the cultural identity of the choral group. Data collection was obtained through preliminary studies, music analysis, and video analysis. Through preliminary studies, the researchers obtained data on the culture from which the folksong *Yamko Rambe Yamko* originated. Data obtained through music analysis includes local ornaments and singing styles that are often found in traditional Papuan songs. Non-musical aspects, such as choreography, costumes, and props, is obtained through video analysis.

### 4 Discussions

Based on video analysis, TRCC, which represents the arrangement of *Yamko Rambe Yamko's* song, appears in a local style that is synonymous with a certain ethnic group in Indonesia, namely Papua (Fig. 1). Rai [10] explained that the Papuan people are one of the ecological communities that are still very thick in maintaining their cultural identity is the Papuan people. Papuan tribes belong to the Melanesian race which has physical characteristics of curly hair, black skin, and high nose. According to Somantri, as quoted by Rai [10], the word Papua comes from Malay which means curly hair, a picture that refers to the physical appearance of indigenous Papuan tribes. Rai [10] stated that the local wisdom of the Papuan people is also in the form of certain patterns of behavior (activities), including in responding to or how they interact with the local nature. In general, Papuan art-culture, including in the form of music, dance, and painting, reflects the relationship between the Papuan people and the surrounding natural environment [10].

#### 4.1 Cultural Identity in Song Arrangement

In terms of musical aspects, cultural identity in the arrangement of this song is often found in the style of African people in singing, for example the use of certain shouts (yelling or yodeling), mouth-patting or mouth-clapping (patting the mouth while shouting), call and response, hoquet, ostinato, onomatopoeia, as well as the use of body percussion,



**Fig. 1.** TRCC in the GrandPrix Competition of Musica Eterna 2017, Roma, Italy.

especially foot beats and hand claps. The arrangement of this song begins with a series of melodies in which each note is sung with one letter, namely É, O, and A by shouting (yelling or yodeling) which seems to ‘call’ or attract the attention of other members or the audience (Fig. 2).

There is also the use of body percussion and mouth-patting or mouth-clapping techniques and a slight use of interlocking techniques in this arrangement, as shown in the Figs. 3 and 4.

The use of body percussion is done several times in singing the arrangement of this song. At the end of the song, for example, body percussion is combined with mouth-patting or mouth-clapping techniques and yelling as is often seen in certain occasions in African societies (Fig. 5).

The local musical character also encountered in the arrangement of this song is the call and response technique. Kaemmer [11], explains that call and response on which one person leads out with a phrase, and the rest of the people join in with a reply. The call and response form can be repeated indefinitely, and often the leader creates considerable variation [11]. As is common in African societies, call and response in this arrangement refers to the activity of a person (group leader/leader) who initiates a chant or activity with a phrase to which other people respond to it. Contrary to Kaemmer’s explanation, the form of call and response can be repeated randomly and often the leader creates variations that can be understood by the followers of his group. Kaemmer also explained that the melodies in the song in the form of call and response sometimes overlap (overlap)

**Fig. 2.** Shouting (yelling or yodeling) (  ) performed by all members of the choir.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.), Mezzo (Mezzo), and Alto (Alto) voices. The lyrics are: "Ho! Yam-ko Ram-be Yam - ko! A-ro-ma - wa Kim - be". The score includes vocal lines and a percussion line at the bottom labeled "all singers" with notes for "clap" and "clap". Two blue boxes highlight interlocking patterns between the Alto 1 and Alto 2 parts. A purple box highlights the percussion line.

**Fig. 3.** Interlocking (  ) between the sounds of Alto 1 and Alto 2 and the pounding of the feet and body percussion (  ) for all members of the choir.

The image shows a musical score for Soprano (Sop.), Mezzo (Mezzo), and Alto (Alto) voices. The lyrics are: "Ho! Yam-ko Ram-be Yam - ko! A-ro-ma - wa Kim - be". The score includes vocal lines and a percussion line at the bottom labeled "all singers" with notes for "clap" and "clap". A yellow box highlights a shouting technique on the voice of Solo Soprano. A photograph of a performer in traditional attire is shown on the right.

**Fig. 4.** Shouting with mouth-clapping or mouth-patting techniques (patting the mouth while shouting) (  ) on the voice of Solo Soprano.

creating another type of multipart music. In this form of song, the response often starts before the ‘call’ or solo part is finished, resulting in two melodic lines simultaneously.

The phenomenon of symbolically generated sounds is associated with the overlapping of sounds in the forest and the environment of people at work. Kaemmer’s explanation is in accordance with Gee’s opinion, as cited by Ntombela [12], who explained that from a sociocultural perspective, traditional music can provide a certain amount of knowledge based on the community and instill listeners’ beliefs through musical material found within their community (Fig. 6) [12].



**Fig. 5.** The lowest sound performs shouting with mouth-clapping or mouth-patting techniques (patting the mouth while shouting) (  ) and stomping feet (  ) while calling for ‘hoo-hah hah’. At the end it closes with a shouting (  ) performed by all kinds of sounds.



**Fig. 6.** Call (  ) and response (  ) pada suara Sopran (call) serta Alto dan Mezzo (response).

In Fig. 7, it can be said to be repetition with the call and response technique because it looks like a call in the Solo Soprano voice and an answer (response) in the Mezzo 1 and 2 voices.

Ostinato, which is also one of the musical characters commonly encountered in the traditional music of African peoples, is also used in the arrangement of this song. Hudson [13] in explaining that ostinato (Lt.: ‘obstinate’) is a term used to refer to the repetition





a subject of its case study. Pohjola [5], as cited by Aswegen and Potgieter, once suggested that there was a new interest in folk music around the world, for example folk music 'expresses the essence of a culture'; Folk music forms cultural images, or gives cultural impressions, and touches human emotions. These experiences open up opportunities to accept difference and diversity in human life. In their conclusions, Aswegen [5], posit that music or folk songs in the choir repertoire have important benefits, in particular to bridge cultural differences. Children who belong to the choir group, the conductors and arranger of the songs involved, as well as the audience can be influenced in a positive way with folk music performances from diverse cultural groups.

Folk songs in choral performances generally use the native language of the region from which the song originated. Therefore, the pronunciation of its text must be mastered by all members of the choir. Aswegen [5], explain that proper pronunciation of the text plays an important role when performing folk songs in their native language and reflects choral respect for certain cultural groups. In addition to text in the original language, choir managers should also consider other non-musical components, such as the use of movement, in choral performances. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that each choir group have an instructor who masters the culture (local language or movement/dance or visual arts) from which the folk song to be sung comes from in an attempt to help the choir group with the authentic dances or movements performed when singing folk songs.

The non-musical components actually enrich and increase the audience's appreciation of the choir performance. Kastner [3], explains that the presence of non-musical components can actually improve the quality of choral performances. Acker [8], were inspired by a statement by Campbell and Wiggind, editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Musical Cultures*, which describes the existence of different musical experiences and diverse child populations around the world. The Acker and Nyland article shows the contribution of their thinking to certain interdisciplinary genres by contextualizing and describing a famous children's choir in Serbia performing at Belgrade Orthodox Cathedral (Saborna Crkva). In the article Acker and Nyland conclude an exploration of musical culture, community, and identity. They used the concept of Perezhivane from Vygotskian to link children's emotional experiences with adult culture and history to explain why participation in children's choirs has a significant role in cultural learning and identity formation [8].

Other research on choral performances involving also non-musical components was also put forward by Wolfe [14] as presented by the student choir group The University Singers of The University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. Wolfe Jr. in his dissertation concluded that through performance, the members of the choir demonstrated their role as cultural ambassadors for Jamaica and the entire Caribbean region. The performance of this choir group involves the use of lighting, instrumentation, stage layout, costumes, and movements [14].

Bartolome [6], in his research on choral music culture in Pretoria East, South Africa concluded that choirs are seen as having a variety of roles, including demonstrating the diversity of South African music culture and affirming South Africa's national identity. Choirs can be a source of bridging social capital, supporting cooperation among participants from different racial and cultural backgrounds, demonstrating intercultural

understanding and belief, and strengthening South Africa's broad sense of national identity.

TRCC Choir has shown that their performance in singing a Papuan folk song, *Yamko Rambe Yamko*, in the Choir Festival not only introduces cultural identity in music, but also involves non-musical aspects. They not only captivate the attention of international audiences through the characteristics commonly found in traditional Papuan music, but also their visual beauty, both in the form of choreography and local costumes and props. In *Yamko Rambe Yamko's* performance, TRCC 'expresses the essence of a culture'; Folk music forms the image of culture, or gives the impression of culture, and touches human emotions. These experiences open up opportunities to accept difference and diversity in human life. The meaning of TRCC's participation in Choir Festival has an important role, namely increasing mutual respect with fellow festival participants, learning the uniqueness of different cultures, increasing audience appreciation with the uniqueness of various cultures in Indonesia.

## 5 Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained, it can be said that generally the presence of choral groups in all parts of the world in festivals or competitions at the international level today no longer focuses only on the singing abilities of its members, but also elements outside of music (extra musical), such as the use of movements in the form of choreography as well as costumes and props that correspond to the theme of the song being sung. Therefore, it is well understood that a choir group is no longer only supported by sound coaches, but also choreographers and costumers, in an effort to optimize the performance of a choral group.

The totality of choral groups from Indonesia who performed singing arrangements of folk songs, such as *Yamko Rambe Yamko* (TRCC), with the support of choreography and costumes that matched the theme of the song certainly had a very significant influence on the appreciation of the audience, especially the judges. The choral group's performance not only increased the appreciation of the audience and judges, especially in the international community, for the beauty in the performance, but also added to the audience's insight into the cultural diversity that exists in Indonesia, both through the text of the song and its musical uniqueness, as well as the style of costumes and props used. Music is often a way to build and maintain a group identity.

Music often serves to emphasize the ethnic identity or main characteristics of a distinct ethnic group in a larger society [11]. It can be said that in representing folk/folk songs at international festivals, a choral group not only demonstrates the uniqueness of local styles in the cultural diversity in Indonesia, both musically and non-musically, but also becomes 'cultural ambassadors' who reinforce their national identity internationally.

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