

TRACKING ECOLOGICAL ISSUES IN MUSIC: KOES PLUS' SONG "KOLAM SUSU" IN NATURAL SYMBOLS

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to trace ecological issues in music, especially the song *Kolam susu* popularized by the band Koes Plus in 1973. The research method used in this research is a qualitative type, in which the form of data is descriptive narrative. Data sources in the research were taken from scientific articles, books, and public space information (netnography). The validation technique applied in this research is the triangulation technique and for the theory of analyzing the meaning of the lyrics used is the semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. The results of this study found (1) ecological issues have also become a concern for many music artists in the world, (2) *Kolam susu* songs in general include the first generation of music that represents ecological issues in the case of Indonesia, the popularity of *Kolam susu* songs also certainly has a strong impact on the distribution of positive ecological messages massively and widely (3) the presence of ecological criticism expression format in song media will make social messages more easily accepted by the public.

Keywords: Ecology, Music, Song, *Kolam Susu*, Koes Plus

INTRODUCTION

Currently, various phenomena related to industrial development are observed, which indirectly lead to increasing environmental pollution and global warming (Sulistiyono, 2012). This phenomenon is, undoubtedly, an inherent aspect of human existence, as individuals evolve and progress in accordance with the advancements of industry that surround them. To mitigate the adverse effects of industrial development on the environment, it is essential to implement effective oversight that incorporates the perspectives of the local community as a balance. One medium through which resistance to this industrial dominance can be expressed is music, which has evolved into a tool for ecological critique (Rose, 2014).

Music serves as a medium of expression that has been used by humanity for generations to communicate the emotions, concepts, and aspirations

of its creators (Irawana & Desyandri, 2019). Music may evolve into songs (with lyrics), serving as a more explicit medium for delivering messages, hence enhancing the acceptance of society. Music from the 19th and 20th centuries is often used as a medium for social critique, especially regarding ecological concerns, as previously explained (Morthon, 2009).

One Indonesian musician who has popularized environmental issues through their work is Koes Plus with the song "*Kolam Susu*." Koes Plus is a renowned Indonesian traditional pop band established in 1968 by Tonny Koeswoyo, Nomo Koeswoyo, Yon Koeswoyo, Yok Koeswoyo, Murry (Kasmuri), and Totok Adji Rachman (Totok A.R.). "*Kolam Susu*" is featured on the album Volume 8, first released in 1973 (Darmawan & Albar, 2020).

The composition *Kolam Susu* was inspired by the visit of the band Koes Plus to Lake Kolam Susuk in Atambua, East Nusa Tenggara, during their journey

from Kupang to Dilli in 1971. Yon Koeswoyo, inspired by the picturesque majesty of Lake *Kolam Susuk* (Widiyarsih, 2002), drew upon it as the muse for the creation of the renowned song titled *Kolam Susu*. Indeed, the song *Kolam Susu* has been included on the soundtrack of an Indonesian tourist program and has been recorded by several local performers to this day.

Therefore, research on the song *Kolam Susu* is essential to highlight its significance as a legendary composition appreciated by the Indonesian nation, while also analyzing its role as an instrument for environmental (ecological) preservation, particularly within Indonesia.

The advantages of this research will benefit two groups: the general public and scholars, particularly within the arts discipline. For the general public, ecological issues may be understood and comprehended more readily and enjoyably through the medium of song. (2) Increasing public awareness that environmental conservation is not solely the responsibility of the government but also the adjacent community, and must be undertaken collaboratively. (3) Fostering collaboration among the general public, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies to develop sustainable ecological conservation initiatives. For art scholars, (1) Offering inspiration to artists and musicians to enhance the creation of works that address environmental and sustainability concerns, (2) Supporting initiatives in education to incorporate music and environmental topics into the curriculum, (3) Serving as a resource for art academics, particularly in the domain of art and its connection to the environment.

The structure of this research includes an introduction, literature review, methods, discussion which is divided into three sub-titles: (1) overview of ecological problems in Indonesia, (2) global music and ecological phenomena, (3) analysis of the general meaning of the song *Kolam Susu*, and (4) ecological issues in the song *Kolam Susu* Koes Plus, conclusion and bibliography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the studied research addressing ecological concerns in the context of music, the first one that comes to mind is Daniel de Fretes's study, "Soundscape: Music and the Environment" (De Fretes, 2016). This research states the significance of preserving auditory harmony within the soundscape, which refers to the acoustic environment

encountered by individuals on a daily basis, to foster a balance between the human body and soul and the natural sounds of the environment. This understanding will encourage connections between individuals and nature, while promoting the importance of ecological concerns.

The second study addressing ecological concerns in relation to song lyrics is conducted by Syakhila Octaviani and Nazwa Nurfauziah, titled *Menelaah Makna Tersembunyi Dalam Lirik Lagu "Istirahat" Nostress* (Octaviani & Nurfauziah, 2023). According to the study, the song "Istirahat" by Nostress refers to giving the earth a rest. This is interpreted in an indirect way as a critique of human behavior up to this point, which purposefully and unintentionally destroys nature and denies the earth time to "rest" (it does not cease being exploited).

The third research addressing ecological concerns in the context of art is conducted by Sri Rustiyanti, Wanda Listiani, and Anrilia Ema M.N, titled *Seni Folklor Dantiang sebagai Etnopsikologi Kesadaran Lingkungan dan Pengembangan Identitas Anak*. This research emphasizes the influence of artistic expressions derived from the folklore traditions present within the local community. This study focuses on dantiang folklore art, which embodies a philosophy emphasizing the significance of environmental protection and the cultivation of cultural identity within a community. The primary educational aim of this artwork is to engage children, positioning them as the future leaders in environmental conservation efforts.

This study explores the significance of the lyrics of Koes Plus' song "Kolam Susu" in relation to ecological concerns. A number of analyses into lyrical interpretation have appeared in the *Sorai Journal*, notably including Angga Eka's (2024) examination of the song "Doda Idi." The study revealed that the song "Doda Idi" continues to possess considerable importance as a cultural performance across three main contexts: assisting in putting children to sleep, serving as a tool for arts and culture education in educational institutions, and embodying the tradition of "turun tanah anak" (*peutren aneuk*). This research motivated the analytical methodology, connecting the song to social contexts as a method for deriving meaning.

In a related piece published in the *Sorai Journal*, Mayla Faiza's (2024) work, "Identitas Jakarta Melalui Karya Kreatif Laleilmanino Berjudul Djakarta" applies a comparable analytical framework to the present article. Mayla applies a musical piece to delve into an individual's personal narrative, illustrating the Jakarta metropolitan landscape.

The previous literature review discusses the interplay between natural and human sounds, the role of artistic works in fostering ecological education among children, and the utilization of contemporary songs as a medium for critiquing surrounding environmental issues. The previous discussion indicates a notable absence of discourse surrounding ecological criticism within the context of music, despite the fact that environmental critique can be traced back to 1973 with the song "*Kolam Susu*," popularized by Koes Plus. This song is widely acknowledged as a metaphorical representation of the fertility and beauty of the natural environment in the Indonesian archipelago.

METHOD

The research applies a qualitative research method, focusing on a thorough and detailed examination of social phenomena (Sugiyono, 2022). The data utilized in qualitative approaches is characterized by descriptive narratives, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument of investigation. Consequently, the quality of this study is significantly influenced by the researcher's comprehensive knowledge and meticulous approach.

This research utilizes data derived from scholarly articles and pertinent literature. The selection primarily relies on research conducted over the past ten years, ensuring a level of quality that can be substantiated. This research applies a data analysis technique grounded in the framework established by Miles and Huberman, highlighting four critical stages in the data analysis process: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2016). The data validation method used in this research is triangulation, whereby researchers assess multiple sources to determine their reliability as scientific data. The chart below presents the triangulation techniques employed in this study, encompassing data sources derived from scientific articles, books, and public space information (netnography).

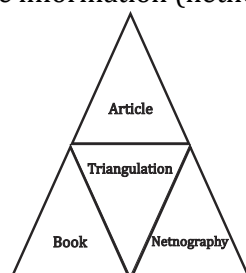


Figure 1. Triangulation Concept.
Source: (Thurmond, 2001)

This theoretical study of the lyrics of the song *Kolam Susu* applies Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis, focusing on the concepts of signifier and signified (Sørensen & Thellefsen, 2022). The signifier refers to the external representation of an object, whereas the signified pertains to the underlying meaning associated with the object under analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Ecological Problems in Indonesia

It is undeniable that Indonesia is currently confronting numerous ecological challenges, which have generated criticism and concern both domestically and internationally. One prominent issue is irresponsible deforestation, which is adversely impacting tropical forests. The rise of illegal logging and land conversion for the palm oil industry are significant contributors to forest degradation. An example case is the logging activities in Gunung Leuser National Park in Sumatra (Ismayadi Samsuodin, 2010), which has elicited widespread condemnation due to its potential harm to the habitats of endangered species such as Sumatran elephants and tigers.

Furthermore, the issue of plastic pollution has also been a subject of criticism and concern in Indonesia. One instance is the Citarum River, the longest river in West Java, which is contaminated by plastic waste and industrial waste (Tita Rosita, 2017). Public cognizance concerning the utilization of single-use plastics must be enhanced to prevent the future buildup of plastic waste, which will pose significant management challenges.

The subsequent matter pertains to the degradation of coral reefs in Indonesia. Severe damage to the coral reefs has taken place in the Raja Ampat Islands, impacting the marine fish ecosystem in the region, as a result of illicit fishing activities and global warming (Muharuddin & Hidayat, 2020).

The emergence of the ecological criticisms mentioned above demonstrates the Indonesian public's concern for environmental sustainability issues within Indonesia. This critique will also indirectly promote modifications in governmental policy and cultivate ecological consciousness within the community.

Global Music and Ecological Phenomena

Modern artistic expressions frequently serve as a medium for communicating ecological themes and enhancing consciousness regarding environmental challenges (Senopati & Wicaksandita, 2023). This frequently serves as an inspiration for artistic creation, as shown by the song "Earth," which gained popularity through Lil Dicky's collaboration with various artists and celebrities. This song by Lil Dicky explores a range of pressing environmental concerns, including climate change, sustainability, and efforts to conserve biodiversity (Soedjarwo, 2021).



Figure 2. Lil Dicky - Earth (Official Music Video).
Source: Lil Dicky Youtube Channel

The lyrics of "Earth" present a touching narrative that encourages listeners to contemplate humanity's duty towards the planet. In specific contexts, Lil Dicky utilizes humor as a medium to communicate significant messages regarding concerns such as deforestation and overfishing. Partnerships with a variety of renowned artists, spanning from vocalists to television personalities, significantly amplify the song's allure and influence within the global community.

It is not solely Lil Dicky with his song "Earth" who has engaged with ecological themes; numerous other artists have similarly addressed environmental concerns, including Jack Johnson, Jason Mraz, and Eddie Vedder through their compositions with ecological significance. For instance, Jack Johnson's track "The 3'Rs" promotes awareness of the principles of "reduce," "reuse," and "recycle" as fundamental measures in environmental conservation.

Three it's a magic number
Yes it is, it's a magic number
Because two times three is six
And three times six is eighteen
And the eighteenth letter in the alphabet is r
We've got three r's we're going to talk about today
We've got to learn to
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Because three it's a magic number
Yes it is, it's a magic number
Three, three, three
Three, six, nine, twelve, fifteen, eighteen,
twenty one, twenty four, twenty seven,
thirty, thirty three, thirty six
Thirty three, thirty, twenty seven, twenty four,
twenty one, eighteen, fifteen, twelve, nine, six
Three, is the magic number

And if the first two r's don't work out
And if you've got to make some trash
Don't throw it out
Recycle, we've got to learn to recycle,
We've got to learn to
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Reduce, reuse, recycle
Because three it's a magic number
Yes it is, it's a magic number
Three, three, three
Three, six, nine, twelve, fifteen, eighteen,
twenty one, twenty four, twenty seven,
thirty, thirty three, thirty six
Thirty three, thirty, twenty seven, twenty four,
twenty one, eighteen, fifteen, twelve, nine, six
Three, is the magic number

You could try them on before you buy some more of those
Reuse, we've got to learn to reuse

Figure 3. The 3'Rs Jack Johnson Song Lyrics.
Source: LyricFind

Through the emotional resonance of music, the aforementioned songs effectively engage listeners on a psychological level (Supradewi, 2010) and enhance their consciousness regarding environmental concerns. Music with ecological themes serves as a form of artistic expression that has the potential to foster positive perceptions and act as a powerful catalyst for inspiring action and promoting change towards a more sustainable existence.

Analysis of the General Meaning of the Song *Kolam Susu*

Table 1. Ferdinand de Saussure's General Analysis of Semiotics on the Lyrics of the Song *Kolam Susu*

| <i>Kolam susu</i> by Koes Plus | | |
|--|--|--|
| Song Lyric | Signifier | Signified |
| <i>Bukan lautan hanya Kolam susu</i> | <i>Bukan lautan dan Kolam susu</i> (Not an ocean dan the pool of milk) is signifier in the first phrase | The signifier of this phrase can be interpreted as meaning that a person's life does not need to be made complex like the ocean, but rather simpler and calm, pure white, like a pool of milk. |
| <i>Kail dan jalan cukup menghidupimu</i> | <i>Kail dan Jala</i> (hook and net) as a common tool in | This phrase can be interpreted as a simple job (fisherman) to make ends meet, |
| <i>Tiada badai tiada topan kau temui</i> | | |
| <i>Ikan dan udang menghampiri dirimu</i> | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | catching fish there is a marker in the second phrase | there is no need to go far to the city to look for work, just use the river or sea. |
| | Aspect of <i>badai dan topan</i> (storms and thypoons, disaster) is the third signifier | The signifier of this phrase can be interpreted as emphasizing that every problem or obstacle (natural disaster) can be overcome with the ability of a self-confident human being. |
| | <i>Ikan dan udang</i> (fish and shrimp) is a catch of the sea, is the signifier in this fourth phrase | The signifier in this phrase can be interpreted as referring to the abundance of sustenance manifested in the richness of food in the ocean that can be enjoyed at any time. |
| Orang bilang tanah kita tanah surga Tongkat kayu dan batu jadi tanaman | <i>Tanah kita, tanah surga</i> (Our land, the land of heaven) is the signifier in this fifth phrase | The signifier in this phrase can be interpreted as an acknowledgment that the land currently occupied has the potential for abundant natural resources and can be enjoyed by many people. |
| | <i>Tongkat kayu dan batu</i> (sticks and stones) is the signifier in the sixth phrase | The signifier in this phrase can be interpreted as the availability of good material tools such as wood and stone to help individuals or groups to manage plants so that they grow well. |

Ecological Issues in the Song *Kolam Susu* Koes Plus

Kolam Susu
Koes Plus

F= do

Bukan lautan hanya kolam susu
ja la cu kup menghidupi mu
Tiada badai dai tiada topan kau temu
Ikan dan udang menghampiri diri mu
Orang bilang tanah kita tanah surga
yu dan batu jadi tanaman
Tongkat kayu dan batu jadi tanaman

Figure 4. *Kolam susu Musical Notes and Song Lyrics.*
Source: imagenspravoces.blogspot.com

The lyrics of the song *Kolam Susu* by Koes Plus, while not explicitly addressing ecological concerns, can be interpreted in relation to themes of environmental sustainability and the harmonious interplay between humanity and nature. This study analyzes the lyrics of the song *Kolam Susu*, offering insights into perspectives on ecological concerns. (1) *Kolam Susu* serves as a symbol of balance; the initial phrase "*bukan lautan, hanya Kolam Susu*" (not an ocean, just a pool of milk) embodies the concept of ecological balance. The dynamics of a pool ecosystem highlight the necessity of limitations and balance, serving as a reminder of the critical role humans play in preserving natural equilibrium for enhanced ecological sustainability.

(2) The second phrase's lyrics, "*tiada badai, tiada topan*," (no storms, no typhoons) and "*ikan dan udang menghampiri dirimu*," (fish and shrimp come to you) emphasize a profound connection with nature and the abundance of the ecosystem, reflecting a state of environmental harmony. The representation of these phrases prompts audiences to consistently contemplate the significance of safeguarding marine biodiversity and ecosystems.

(3) The relationship between agricultural practices and the management of natural resources can be illustrated in the phrase, "*tanah kita tanah surga, tongkat kayu dan batu jadi tanaman*," (our land is heavenly land, wooden sticks and stones become plants) which illustrates the connection between humanity and the environment. This message serves

as an imperative for protecting land as an essential entity and to maintain agricultural ecosystems in a manner that is both healthy and sustainable.

The overarching theme of the song "*Kolam Susu*" emphasizes the interconnectedness and balance between humanity and the surrounding natural environment. Moreover, from a psychological standpoint, the lyrics of the song can highlight the significance of sustaining ecosystem balance, safeguarding biodiversity, and conserving natural resources for enhanced ecological sustainability. As a piece of artwork, "*Kolam Susu*" functions as a medium for disseminating ecological messages and indigenous knowledge to a broader audience.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, (1) It is evident that ecological issues have garnered the attention of numerous music artists globally. This is seen by Lil Dicky's piece titled "Earth" and Jack Johnson's work "The 3R's," both of which implicitly critique international environmental policies.

(2) The song "*Kolam Susu*" is widely regarded as a pioneering work among the initial generation of musical compositions to address ecological concerns within Indonesia. This is reflected in every phrase in the song's lyrics, which are very Indonesia-centric (as evidenced by the depiction of nature). The song's popularity has demonstrably exerted a significant influence on the broad dissemination of its positive environmental messages.

(3) The song *Kolam Susu* by Koes Plus represents a format for articulating ecological criticism through music, embedding social messages that resonate more readily with the audience. This approach fosters heightened awareness and encourages ongoing efforts to maintain a sustainable environment for the future.

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