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 Kumud 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.

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

[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 stasian mumpak ojekan
Ngombe kolak sarapane ketan
[Going to the station by ride. Drinking kolak, eating sticky rice].

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 astile” “[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 denotive 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.

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.

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

Distancing iku dulur lak sebutane
Aku dewe gak negerti artine
Tapi aku pahum 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.

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 tame 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 selamiyono
[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 socio-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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