

# Song Lyrics as a Historical Source in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Song lyrics are one of the historical sources that historians have not adequately utilized. Such historical sources are considered to contain information on historical events. So far, song lyrics are considered the product of the songwriter's imagination, so they have no valid information. Song lyrics are similar to literary works such as poetry or prose. Literary experts argue that most literary works have references to actual events. Thus, both song lyrics and literary works can be used as alternative historical sources to complement official sources. The purpose of this study is to explore songs in Indonesia whose lyrics refer to actual events in history, even though the song is the product of the songwriter's imagination. The method used in this study is the historical method by selecting song lyrics that are considered to tell events and are associated with historical narratives in the context of a certain place and time. Most of those songs are ballads which are used as data sources. The results show several songwriters and ballad singers in Indonesia whose songs refer to actual events include Iwan Fals, Ebiet G. Ade, Rhoma Irama, and Benyamin Sueb. Their songs contain information about the reality of lower-class people living in Jakarta from 1950s to 1980s. Using song lyrics as a historical source will enrich historical narratives written by historians to contain psychological aspects as when the event occurred as written by the songwriters.

**Abstrak:** Lirik lagu merupakan salah satu sumber sejarah yang belum dimanfaatkan dengan baik oleh para ahli sejarah. Sumber sejarah semacam itu dianggap mengandung informasi tentang peristiwa sejarah. Selama ini lirik lagu dianggap sebagai hasil imajinasi pencipta lagu, sehingga dianggap tidak memiliki informasi yang valid. Lirik lagu sebenarnya mirip dengan karya sastra seperti puisi atau prosa. Pakar sastra berpendapat bahwa sebagian besar karya sastra memiliki rujukan pada peristiwa aktual. Dengan demikian, baik lirik lagu maupun karya sastra dapat dijadikan sumber sejarah alternatif untuk melengkapi sumber resmi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi lagu-lagu di Indonesia yang liriknya mengacu pada peristiwa aktual dalam sejarah, meskipun lagu tersebut merupakan hasil imajinasi penulis lagu. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode sejarah dengan memilih lirik lagu yang dianggap menceritakan peristiwa dan dikaitkan dengan narasi sejarah dalam konteks tempat dan waktu tertentu. Sebagian besar dari lagu-lagu tersebut adalah balada yang digunakan sebagai sumber data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa beberapa pencipta lagu dan penyanyi ballad di Indonesia yang lagunya mengacu pada kejadian sebenarnya antara lain Iwan Fals, Ebiet G. Ade, Rhoma Irama, dan Benyamin Sueb. Lagu-lagu mereka berisi informasi tentang realitas masyarakat kelas bawah yang tinggal di Jakarta pada tahun 1950-an hingga 1980-an. Penggunaan lirik lagu sebagai sumber sejarah akan memperkaya narasi sejarah yang ditulis oleh para sejarawan agar mengandung aspek-aspek psikologis seperti saat terjadinya peristiwa yang ditulis oleh para pencipta lagu.

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## INTRODUCTION

History is a science that is relatively loose in terms of the use of sources. In a sense, whatever the source type is, as long as it refers to the context of the event being studied, it can be used to construct the desired narrative. The use of historical sources by historians to compile historical narratives (historiography) has developed from time

to time (Grigg, 1991, p. 228). It follows human activities that leave traces or evidence that can be used as historical sources. Traces or evidence in the historical method are primary sources, the first sources that refer to an event, so they have high-quality historical sources (Sager & Rosser, 2015, p. 199).

Until the 1990s, historical research in Indonesia relied more on written sources, most of which were official and categorized as primary sources (Camba, et al., 2020, p. 1056). The historical sources used to compile historical narratives come from direct evidence in the form of written documents. In one of his writings, the leading Indonesian historian, Sartono Kartodirdjo, emphasizes that the credibility of historical research is primarily determined by verbal data, such as letters, journals, memoirs, and reports (Malaka, 2020). However, it is possible that broader historical sources, such as monuments, artifacts, and photographs, can also be used as a basis for writing historical narratives (Kartodirdjo, 1983, p. 46).

What Kartodirdjo says is in line with the opinion of Mona Lohanda, a senior archivist at the Indonesian National Archives. As opposed to other historical sources, according to Mona Lohanda, archives hold the greatest rank in the hierarchy of historical sources (Sudarman & Hidayaturrahman, 2020, p. 188). Archives are usually categorized as primary sources (Lohanda, 2011, p. 3). This is because most of the archives are created simultaneously as an event, an issue or a phenomenon that arises and occurs in society.

Almost all Indonesian historians follow the views expressed by Kartodirdjo and Lohanda. Even if they use other historical sources, the use is still limited to oral history. The use of oral historical sources is even hesitant, as the historian Bambang Purwanto pointed out (Purwanto, 2006, p. 70). Although the oral history method has been developed for a long time, especially since Allan Nevins from Columbia University (1948) introduced this method, in Indonesia until a few years ago, the method was still considered less weighty than written sources.

Alun Munslow in 1997 published a book that changed the view of historians regarding the use of historical sources. Munslow argues that historical evidence does not refer to the past which can be accurately represented, but is only a means of representing the interpretation of that past (Munslow, 2002, p. 43). In essence, historians never know what the authors of historical sources mean, so the use of historical sources is only a means of making interpretations.

In fact, the most important tool for narrating the past is the language used by historians. Thus, the historical sources that historians can utilize become very numerous and have the same meaning (Munslow, 2006, p. 63). Historians need not depend on written sources only, but also on any sources that can be used to help interpret various events in the past. Such awareness is currently starting to develop in Indonesia in line with the spread of deconstructionism in historical research developed by Bambang Purwanto at Gadjah Mada University in the 2000s (Purwanto, 2006).

The use of alternative sources is relatively acceptable to historians, especially in universities. Understanding and narrating the past does not depend on written sources alone, because there are also many other alternative sources (Ogunmakinde, et al., 2022, p. 10). Currently, historical studies in Indonesia seem to be freer and more casual, and written narratives are also more popular. Barber (et al) in her book *History Beyond the Text* offers many alternative sources for compiling historical narratives. One such alternative source is a work of art. Some of the results of art proposed by Barber et al include fine art, cartoons, and music (Barber, 2013). Individuals are affected emotionally and psychologically by music. The use of art as a historical source of course requires interpretation with the help of other sources using the cross method.

The use of alternative historical sources has broadened the historian's perspective on the past. History is no longer seen from a very official perspective and is no longer narrative in nature through a very formal way of thinking (De Dijn, 2020, p. 1). Through alternative historical sources, historians can see marginalized people's role, which cannot be recorded in government archives. Everyday history can be well narrated with the help of photographs, such as the study conducted by the Australian historian, Jean Gelman Taylor, on the history of Aceh (Taylor, 2008, p. 313).

One of the works of art that is quite easy to use as a historical source is a song. In this case, part of the song used as a historical source is the lyrics or the text. Song lyrics are the composition/series of words with the tone to be sung. A song is a variety of rhythmic sounds (in speaking, singing, reading, and so on) (Cummins, 2020, p. 347). Song lyrics are usually closely related to the mood and imagination of the songwriter when writing a song (Cheatley, et al., 2020, p. 33). Thus, the creation of a song and its lyrics must be closely related to various things that are felt and/or seen by the songwriter. That aspect is the reason why song lyrics can be used as a histori-

cal source.

The purpose of this article is to explain the lyrics of Indonesian songs which can be used as historical sources, by looking for a correlation between the lyrics of the songs and the context of the events contained therein. If the lyrics refer to actual events, and have the context of space and time, we can be sure that the lyrics are historical sources. The method used is selecting the song lyrics that are considered to tell actual events and putting the lyrics into a historical narrative with a context of a certain place and time. The period used as the limitation of this study is the 1950s to 1990s, referring to the writing of the selected song lyrics. The theme that will be narrated is limited to the lower class in urban history in Indonesia and transportation accidents. The themes were chosen because both are reflected quite a lot in the lyrics of Indonesian songs from the 1950s to 1990s.

## METHOD

This research used historical methods. The historical method is presented by describing events in song lyrics and linking them to historical narratives in a certain place and time context. The data source in this research was obtained from ballad songs, namely songs entitled *Naik Becak* (By Pedicab), *Tukang Becak 1* (Pedicab Driver 1), *Tukang Becak 2* (Pedicab Driver 2), *Opera Tukang Becak* (The Opera of a Pedicab Driver), *Gelandangan* (Vagrant), *Kontrasmu Bisu* (Your Contrast is Silent), *1910* (1910), and *Sebuah Tragedi 1981* (The Tragedy of 1981). The data used in this research are song lyrics related to the study. Data was collected by selecting songs and noting them according to the focus of the research, and then the lyrics of the songs were analyzed, interpreted, and concluded as answers to the objectives of this study. The data in this research was verified by carefully cross-checking the data with related literature and similar research conducted by other researchers.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SONG LYRICS

In general, song lyrics are no different from other literary works such as poetry, short stories, or novels, because they are a series of words arranged systematically to form a narrative. The series of words form sentences that express or tell certain conditions. The characteristics of literary works in general are the imagination of the author. Imagination implies, first, fantasy; second, the capacity of cognition to visualize events based on reality or personal experience (in daydreams) or to produce images of those events (in paintings, writings, etc.)

Imagination certainly does not come from empty space. Imagination in many ways refers to a reality seen and felt by the owner of the imagination, namely the author. According to Rene Wellek, the reference of literary works is not the actual world but the world of fiction, and literary works are understood as creative works and are the result of the author's creation. However, literary works cannot be regarded as purely fictional works (Faruk, 2010, p. 48).

Ricoeur stated that although literary works are imaginative works, it does not mean they do not have references to social reality. Ricoeur further argued that social reality will build awareness regarding the author (Faruk). This aligns with the view of Kuntowijoyo, a historian and a writer. According to him, even though literary works are fictitious, they are not considered contrary to social reality. Literary work is an imaginative work that is able to capture social structures outside the work. Kuntowijoyo even emphasizes that historical reality, which is a social reality of the past, is often used as a background for writing literary works so that what is known as a historical novel or social novel is born (Kuntowijoyo, 1987, p. 133).

The study conducted by Wiyatmi who studied Laksmi Pamuntjak's literary work entitled *Amba* which tells of prisoners on Buru Island concluded that literary work can be categorized as a new approach in history. Although *Amba* is a literary work, it refers to reality, the story of political prisoners on Buru Island during the New Order era (Wiyatmi, 2020, p. 70). Most of the literary works written by Pramoedya Ananta Toer are also historical narratives written in literary language. This proves that although literary works are basically imaginative works, some of them have references to the actual world. Literary works that refer to reality are historical novels, as written by Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Hun, 2020, p. 81).

Song lyrics too. There are imaginative songs, but there are also song lyrics that refer to actual events. The latter is similar to historical poetry or historical novels, where the background is actual events that occurred in the past. One of the poets who wrote many poems with historical events as the background is Chairil Anwar. His poem entitled *Diponegoro* refers to the heroism of Pangeran Diponegoro who fought against the Dutch in 1825-1830 (Eneste, 2006).

Not many song lyrics take the background of actual events in Indonesia, considering the possibility that song can be a tool for interpersonal communication (Akhtabi & Puryanti, 2022, p. 270).

Most songs written by Indonesian song writers tell (imagine) the beauty of young people's love. Such songs may originate from actual events experienced by the songwriters, but the events are so personal that they are difficult to use as historical sources. Since the end of the 19th century, songs about young love have dominated Indonesian music (Suadi, 2017). This is unavoidable because love is a never-ending source of inspiration for artists.

Amid the creation of melancholy songs about romance, there are also songs with social themes whose lyrics refer to actual events. Such songs are known as ballad. A ballad is a song in the form of a narrative. This means a song whose lyrics refer to a true story, which could be the true story of the songwriter or contemporary actual events (Masterclass.com, 2021).

Ballad originally developed in England from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. It was originally a poem which was then sung. Ballad then spread throughout Europe, and along with the exploration of Europeans to various continents, ballad eventually developed throughout the world, including Indonesia. The general characteristic of ballad songs is that the lyrics are similar to a narrative, or in other words, a narrative that is sung. Thus, ballad songs are very close to actual reality (Long, 1973, p. 233). The lyrics of ballad songs are most likely to be used as historical sources because they refer to a reality at a certain time (and place).

In Indonesia, ballads songwriters and singers include Iwan Fals and Ebiat G. Ade (Lockard, 1996, p. 161). Iwan Fals is a singer with his distinctive singing, mainly containing criticism of the New Order government, by revealing the reality of the depravity of the authorities through songs (Sutton, 2004, p. 207). Referring to the songs he sang that reveal people's daily realities, singer and comedy movie star Benyamin Sueb can also be considered as a ballad singer (Amal, et al., 2019, p. 13). Some of the songs written and sung by dangdut singer Rhoma Irama can also be categorized as ballad songs (Frederick, 1982, p. 103). Many other singers' songs are categorized as ballads (Koeswoyo, 2016).

## THE HISTORY OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED IN URBAN AREA

Indonesian historian, Sartono Kartodirdjo, once reminded us that for decades, Indonesian history has focused more on the elite class and the ruling class. The underprivileged are very difficult to enter the stage of history because they are considered not to have a significant role in a change. Only when history is written using social science approaches

and theories can the reality of the underprivileged be revealed. With the approach of sociological theories, the role of farmers in the historical stage can be examined and written about (Kartodirdjo, 1992, p. 12). Following what was done by the annales historians led by Marc Bloch in France and the new history led by James Harvey Robinson in America, Sartono Kartodirdjo managed to compile a dissertation on the Banten peasant rebellion in 1888 (Kartodirdjo, 1966, p. 392).

Writing the history of the underprivileged is not easy because their activities receive less attention, so they are rarely recorded in written sources, not reported in newspapers or other mass media. The author's experience was when writing the history of the struggle for urban space for the Surabaya case in the 1900-1960s, that the underprivileged were only reported in the newspapers when they took actions that attracted public attention, for example committing crimes, demonstrations, or becoming a city disturbance. This means that what attracts the attention of mass media crews is not the underprivileged themselves but rather the events where the underprivileged are involved in, namely crime, demonstrations, or other social pathologies (Basundoro, 2018). In other words, the underprivileged often go unnoticed and are "unreported." As a result, historical sources for this group are sometimes difficult to find (Erman, 2013, p. 382).

There are actually some songwriters (sometimes a singer as well) who raise the everyday reality of the underprivileged in their songs. This is of course an interesting thing that lead to a question. What is so interesting about the underprivileged that it is sung? Does anyone want to listen to the stories of the underprivileged through songs? The existence of songs about the reality of the underprivileged should be welcomed by historians because they can be used as historical sources when it comes to writing the history of the underprivileged.

One of the occupations of the underprivileged who was made into a song is pedicab driver. Research by Erwiza Erman indicates that pedicabs first appeared in Indonesian cities in the early 20th century, particularly in Jakarta and Surabaya (Erman, 2013, p. 382). Until the 1980s, pedicabs were still the mainstay of transportation in urban areas in Indonesia. Its ability to break through traffic jams and small alleys has made it popular with many people who need short-distance transportation. Urban children idolize pedicabs because they can go around the city by them, as the children singing the song (*Naik Becak*) (By Pedicab) created

by Ibu Sud, with the following lyrics:

**Naik Becak**

*saya mau tamasya  
berkeliling keliling kota  
hendak melihat-lihat keramaian yang ada  
saya panggilkkan becak  
kereta tak berkuda  
becak, becak, coba bawa saya  
.....*

**By Pedicab**

I want to go on a trip  
Around the city  
want to see the crowds there  
Get me a pedicab  
A horseless carriage  
pedicab, pedicab, please take me

The pedicab, which in the eyes of children is a fun vehicle, turns out to be attached to the underprivileged of urban areas, namely the pedicab drivers. In general, pedicab drivers are poor people who do not have sufficient capital skills to live in urban areas. How do historians describe the life of pedicab drivers in the past? One of them is by using songs. At least there are several songs that can be used as historical sources to narrate the life of pedicab drivers in urban areas.

There are two songs sung by Benyamin Sueb, a singer from Jakarta (1935-1995), which tells the life of a pedicab driver. Both songs are titled *Tukang Becak* (Pedicab Driver). *Tukang Becak 1* (Pedicab Driver 1) describes the characteristics of pedicab drivers who have high solidarity when they have to deal with people who annoy them. Solidarity with others becomes the weapon of the underprivileged when dealing with people of a higher stratum.

**Tukang Becak 1**

*.....  
Tukang becak takjub lupa minggir dan berpaling  
Dari belakang, eh disruduk sebuah mobil  
Terguling-guling, meleng sih*

*Tukang becak marah-marah  
Hendak menyiapkan kawan  
Untung dapat disadarkan kawan dalam rasa per-  
satuan*

*.....*

**Pedicab Driver 1**

*.....  
The amazed pedicab driver forgot to pull over and  
look away  
From behind, he was hit by a car*

Rolled over, as he was sloppy

Pedicab driver got angry  
Wanted to call out his fellow pedicab drivers  
Fortunately, brought around by his friends in a  
sense of unity

The incident as described in the song lyrics often befalls pedicab drivers. Such incident is rarely recorded in the news or archives because it is considered ordinary event that does not have high value. The government administration may also not record it because it is not an event that is regarded as important. However, the artist Benyamin Sueb made it into a song, so we can use it as a historical source. Through this song, we can capture the social solidarity in the community of the underprivileged people in urban areas and their emotional state, especially the pedicab drivers. As confirmation, based on the research conducted by Erman, pedicab drivers are easily provoked to fight together if one of them experiences interference. Several cases of violence in the name of pedicab driver solidarity are clearly described in his research report (Erman, 2013, p. 382).

The song *Tukang Becak 2* (Pedicab Driver 2) completes the first song, describing where the urban underprivileged people come from. Most of the pedicab drivers in urban areas are part of the urbanization trend, namely rural people who move to cities (Speare & Harris, 1986, p. 227). Referring to how Benjamin sang this song, it is clear that he wanted to emphasize the origins of some of the pedicab drivers he described. The lyrics of this song are written in the Javanese Tegal dialect, as an affirmation that what is being "narrated" in the song are the migrant pedicab drivers from Tegal, an area located on the north coast of Java with its distinctive Javanese language (Utomo, 2017). When Benyamin sang the song, it was clear that he was trying to position himself as an "immigrant from Tegal" who was singing even though he was a true Betawi. The full lyrics of *Tukang Becak 2* (Pedicab Driver 2) written and sung by Benyamin are as follows:

**Tukang Becak 2**

*Inyong kiye si tukang becak  
Wara-wiri ngubengi kota  
Maring Tegal dan Jogjakarta  
Golet pangan aduh nelangsa*

*Blangsak temen urip tukang becak  
Pake susah abdi mang suka  
Dasar nasib kalara-lara  
Blangsak temen tuh kaya kuda  
.....*

## Pedicab Driver 2

I'm a pedicab driver  
Going around the city  
From Tegal to Yogyakarta  
Doing it for a living, oh miserable

So miserable to live a life as a pedicab driver  
Though it is hard, I really enjoy it  
Living a painful fate  
So miserable like a horse

Is there any other historical source confirming pedicab drivers' origins in Jakarta? Is it true that some of them are from Tegal? Once again, citing Erwiza Erman's research results, most of the pedicab drivers in Jakarta from the 1960s to 1980s were from Tegal, Pekalongan, and Cirebon (Erman, 2013, p. 407). Apart from giving information about the origins of pedicab drivers, the song also gives us information about the hardships of working as a pedicab driver. The second stanza describes how hard it is to work as a pedicab driver. His fate is very painful because the burden is almost like a horse's.

The burden of being a pedicab driver became even more intense when, at the end of the 1970s, pedicabs were banned from main roads in Jakarta, with the implementation of pedicab-free zones. The ban has made migrants from the village who worked as pedicab drivers suffer even more. Not only would they lose their jobs, but they could also lose their pedicabs due to being confiscated by officers. In the 1980s, the operation to ban pedicabs was expanded. Pedicabs caught operating in the pedicab-free zones were then transported to the coast of Jakarta to be thrown out into the sea to become fish houses (Sumarno & Epstein, 1999, p. 172). The suffering of pedicab drivers as a result of the operation is depicted in the song written and sung by Ebiet G. Ade entitled *Opera Tukang Becak* (the Opera of a Pedicab Driver) Through this song, historians can get the depiction of the fate of pedicab drivers who had no more hope because of the ban on the operation of pedicabs on certain roads. Pedicab drivers as described by Ebiet were migrants from villages who were unlucky when they migrated to Jakarta. This is a general depiction of villagers who do not have sufficient education and adequate skills, have a farming background, and take part in urbanization. Coming to the city to eventually be a pedicab driver. Their miserable condition is depicted in the song sung by Ebiet G. Ade, as follows:

## *Opera Tukang Becak*

*Ia melangkah terhuyung  
menyeret tubuh yang kurus  
Mencari sudut terlindung teduh dari terik mentari  
Menatap jalan lengang di depan yang tak ada harapan*

*Kakinya mengayuh angin,  
naluri kebiasaan  
terlalu bodoh untuk mengerti segala macam aturan  
Yang dia tahu dan dirasakan hilang pencaharian*

*Tertidurlah dan bermimpi  
mengayuh becak ke teluk Jakarta  
Berhentilah sampai di sana,  
peluit berdesing di telinga  
ho ho ho ho*

## **The Opera of a Pedicab Driver**

He staggered  
dragging a slender body  
Finding a shelter from the hot sun  
Staring at the deserted road with no hope

His feet pedaling the wind,  
habit instinct  
too fool to understand any rules  
Losing his job is the only thing he knows and feels

Go to sleep and dream  
pedaling a pedicab to Jakarta Bay  
stop right there,  
a whistle whistling in the ear  
ho ho ho ho

Through this song, we as historians can place pedicab drivers in the context of a certain time and space. Of course, it happened in Jakarta because Ebiet had lived in Jakarta since his career as a singer. The time refers to when the song was written, the 1980s. Pedicabs were widely used in Jakarta at the time, with even the commanding officer of the Command for the Restoration of Security and Order using them, Admiral Soedomo, at that time intervened to fix the issue of pedicabs in the capital. Pedicab drivers were left in limbo because they were arrested and their pedicabs were thrown into the sea in Jakarta Bay. Pedicab drivers, as the song says, were caught while pedaling a pedicab preceded by the sound of a whistle that "whistling in the ears", due to not understanding the regulations in this big city. The song clearly even describes the physique of a thin pedicab driver with staggered steps, describing a poor person who lacks food intake. Pedicab operations carried out continuously since Governor Ali Sadikin to Governor Wiyogo Atmodarminto

made thousands of pedicab drivers lose their jobs. Ali Sadikin acknowledged this in his memoirs (Sadikin & Hadimadja, 2012). He cleared Jakarta of pedicabs because the vehicles that use human power were considered to make Jakarta chaotic.

Hints on poor people in urban areas are also described in the song written and sung by the King of Dangdut, Rhoma Irama, in his song *Gelandangan* (Vagrant). Through this song, we can feel how suffering it is to be a vagrant who has no place to live and even has to scavenge for leftovers. Rhoma Irama himself, when singing the song, was so animating that if any historian has heard the song, he can also feel how hard it is to be a vagrant.

### ***Gelandangan***

*Kering sudah rasanya air mataku  
Terlalu banyak sudah yang tertumpah  
Menangis meratapi buruk nasibku  
Nasib buruk seorang tunawisma*

*Langit sebagai atap rumahku  
Dan bumi sebagai lantainya  
Hidupku menyusuri jalan  
Sisa orang yang aku makan  
.....*

*Jembatan menjadi tempat perlindungan  
Dari terik matahari dan hujan  
Begitulah nasib yang aku alami  
Entah sampai kapan hidup begini*

### **Vagrant**

My tears have dried.  
Too much has been spilled  
Crying lamenting my bad luck  
The bad luck of a homeless person

The sky is the roof of my house  
And the earth as the floor  
Spending my life down the road  
Scavenging for one's leftovers  
.....

The bridge becomes a shelter  
From the sun and the rain  
Such is my fate  
I don't know how long I have to live like this

Until now, the history of vagrants has not been studied by many, and of those few, one of them is the research conducted by Parsudi Suparlan on vagrants in Jakarta (Suparlan, 1974, p. 41), and Sektiningsih on vagrants in Surabaya in 1950-1975 (Sektiningsih, 2008). Previously, The Institute for

Economic and Social Research, Education and Information released a little booklet in 1986 that contained a selection of essays (Widiyanto, 1994). Vagrant is one of the urban ailments in various cities worldwide, so its presence always attracts public attention. However, because their position is very low in the public's point of view, one of these urban issues receives less attention from the scientists.

The history of vagrants is still lacking due to the lack of written records and data about them. The song written and sung by Rhoma Irama can be a source for narrating the history of the vagrants in Indonesia, especially for understanding their plight. Of course, when writing the song, Rhoma Irama only referred to his observations of the vagrants. Rhoma Irama had never been like a vagrant, but at least he understood how hard life is as a vagrant because the phenomenon of vagrants has captured the attention of urban communities since the beginning of independence until now (Berman, 2000, p. 151).

Iwan Fals, a singer well known for his stricture to the government during the New Order era, also writes about the lives of underprivileged people in his songs. Sore Tugu Pancoran tells the story of a poor boy who is forced to sell newspapers to support his family. In urban Indonesia, until a few years ago, many children were forced to work to support the economy of their families who live in poverty (Beazley, 2003, p. 115). Iwan Fals describes the lives of such children with a poetic sentence in his song.... "Anak sekecil itu tak sempat nikmati waktu, dipaksa pecahkan karang lemah jarimu terkepal." (A child that young does not have time to enjoy life, forced to break the rock with their weak clench.)

The gap between the rich and the poor grew because the New Order's development ideology proved more lucrative for the wealthy. This supports the claim that language is selective and biased in favor of particular ideas (Bramantio, et al., 2023, p. 2632). In the song entitled *Kontrasmu Bisu* (Your Contrast is Silent), Iwan Fals tells the public about this high inequality. This song portrays Jakarta in the 1980s, at the height of the New Order, where development could not elevate the underprivileged who remained in the illegal huts along the river banks.

### ***Kontrasmu Bisu***

.....  
*Tinggi gedung tinggi mewah angkuh bikin iri  
Gubuk-gubuk liar yang resah di pinggir kali  
Terlihat jelas kepincangan kota ini*

*Tangis bocah lapar bangunkanku dari mimpi malam*

*Lihat dan dengarlah riuh lagu dalam pesta  
Di atas derita mereka masih bisa tertawa  
Memang kuakui kejamnya kota Jakarta  
Namun yang kusaksikan lebih parah dari yang kusangka*

**Your Contrast is Silent**

The high-rise luxurious buildings creates an envy for  
Restless wild huts by the river  
The lameness of this city is clear  
A hungry boy's cry wakes me up from my dream

See and hear the boisterous songs in the party  
Above the pain they can still laugh  
Indeed, Jakarta is cruel  
But what I witness is worse than I thought

The life of poor people in big cities has not been discussed by historians until now. Iwan Fals as a singer and critic tells the lives of the underprivileged people in his songs, which can inspire us all. Lagi Sugali, Lonteku, Brandal Malam di Bangku Terminal, and several others provide an overview of a harsh city life where many poor people or lower class are still a part of it (Susilo, 2019).

Both Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals are musicians who are very critical of the life around them, especially towards political issues and the lives of oppressed people. Some of the songs they wrote illustrate this. The two musicians became idols of young people during the New Order era because of their criticism of those in power. The condition of Indonesia in the 1970-1990s was partly illustrated clearly in the lyrics of songs written by Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals (Lockard, 1996, p. 149).

**TRANSPORTATION ACCIDENT**

The history of Indonesian transportation is a history of accidents. Numerous accidents have happened that people take it as a matter of course. Various transportation accidents in Indonesia caused many casualties, especially accidents involving mass transportation such as trains, ships and airplanes. Many people immediately forget about the accidents a few moments after they occurred, so we never learn to improve our transportation conditions in order to reduce the number of accidents. The history of transportation accidents in Indonesia can be compiled by utilizing a song as a comple-

mentary source. Iwan Fals and Ebiet G. Ade are a few songwriters as well as singers whose the songs record phenomenal transportation accidents.

One year after the terrible train accident in Bintaro in 1987, Iwan Fals wrote a song entitled 1910. The song gives us an idea of how bad the train crash in Bintaro on Monday, October 19, 1987, was. Identification of place is unambiguous in the lyrics of the song, as well as the identification of time. The use of the lyrics of this song to narrate the severe first train accident in Indonesia helps us to understand the "inner mood" when the accident occurred. It is described that the authorities only offered their condolences, so that the accident left nothing but unanswered questions.

**1910**

*Apa kabar kereta yang terkapar di Senin pagi?  
Di gerbongmu ratusan orang yang mati  
Hancurkan mimpi bawa kisah  
Air mata, Air mata*

*19 Oktober tanah Jakarta berwarna merah  
Meninggalkan tanya yang tak terjawab  
Bangkai kereta lemparkan amarah  
Air mata, Air mata*

**1910**

How's the train lying down on Monday morning?  
In your carriage hundreds of people died  
Destroying dreams bringing stories  
Tears, Tears

October 19 the land of Jakarta turned red  
Leaving questions unanswered  
Car wreck threw anger  
Tears, Tears

The train crash in Bintaro is the most serious train accident in the history of Indonesian transportation between KA 225 and KA 220, thus catching the attention of Iwan Fals to write a song about it. The accident killed 139 passengers. Only 113 of them whose identity was discovered and 26 others were unknown (Di Bintaro Pagi itu Maut Menjemput (In Bintaro that Morning Death Came) in Rekaman Peristiwa (Recording of Event) 169-78). As described by Iwan Fals, there is no clear solution to this accident case apart from only punishing one of the machinists of the colliding trains, namely Mr. Slamet Suradio. The sad story of Mr. Slamet Suradio, who became the scapegoat of this great tragedy, can be seen on the youtube channel Kisah Tanah Jawa (Kisah Tanah Jawa, 2019). He was forced into confessing to setting off the train without an order,

for which he was found guilty by the court and had to be jailed.

The second transportation accident that also caught the attention of the public and songwriters is the sinking of the Tampomas II on January 27, 1981. This incident is the worst ship accident in Indonesia (Raillon, 1998, p. 381). Currently, most Indonesian people may have forgotten about this incident, but listeners to the songs of Iwan Fals and Ebiat G. Ade can still hear the story of the tragedy through their songs. Iwan Fals recorded the sinking of the Tampomas II in a piece entitled *Celoteh Camar Tolol dan Cemar* (Babbling Stupid and Dirty Seagulls).

The ship carrying 1.054 passengers and 82 crew members sank after a heavy fire near Masalembu Island, north of the Kangean Islands, Madura. Various attempts were made to prevent the ship's sinking but to no avail. The number of casualties in the ship accident was 369 (Winarno, 1981).

If Iwan Fals mostly narrated the ship's sinking process and criticized the judicial process, Ebiat G. Ade narrated the attitude of the ship's captain who tried to make various efforts to prevent casualties. He heroized the captain of the Tampomas II ship named Abdul Rivai because of his chivalrous attitude and character.

#### ***Sebuah Tragedi 1981***

*Dia nampak tegah berdiri, gagah perkasa  
Berteriak tegas dan lantang, ia nakhoda  
Sebentar gelap hendak turun  
Asap tebal rapat mengurung  
Jeritan yang panjang, rintihan yang dalam,  
derak yang terbakar, dia tak diam  
du du*

*Dia nampak sigap bergerak di balik api  
Seperti ada yang berbisik, ia tersenyum  
Bila bersandar kepadaNya  
terasa ada tangan yang terulur  
Bibirnya yang kering serentak membasah  
Tangannya yang jantan tak kenal diam  
.....*

#### **The Tragedy of 1981**

He stood straight, mighty  
Shouting firmly and loudly, he was the captain  
Soon it would be dark  
Thick smoke tightly surrounding  
Long screams, deep groans,  
the burning crackle, he was not motionless

He seemed swiftly moving behind the fire  
As if someone whispered, he smiled  
When leaning on Him  
He felt a hand was lent

His dry lips moistened at once  
His manly hands were relentless

In his song entitled *Sebuah Tragedi 1981* (The Tragedy of 1981), Ebiat G. Ade tries to describe the efforts made by the captain to save the passengers until the last second when the ship finally sank. The ship's captain, Abdul Rivai, also sank, along with the ship he captained, together with hundreds of other passengers. Ebiat G. Ade described the 1981 tragedy through the song's lyrics as an effort to remind the public regarding transportation accidents as a form of concern about the complicated political situation in 1981.

Referring to previous research, song lyrics are a source of information that is quite valuable as a historical source. This is in line with Peretti's thinking, that there are songs that record past realities that, if carefully examined, have truth that can be accounted for (Barber & Peniston-Bird, 2013). The characteristics of song lyrics are essentially the same as literary works, namely a written narrative that is deliberately created. As Lohanda argues, the functions of song lyrics and literary works are the same when used as historical sources, namely the information contained in them is utilized (Lohanda, 2011). This research also supports Manuaba's opinion, that literary works are social documents produced by authors through a process of intense observation and appreciation of what is happening around them (Manuaba, 2009). They also get inspiration from reading written texts, which is then poured into the literary narratives they create. Manuaba concluded that writers are also historians who write narratives of the past in different language styles. In this way, song lyrics which are the creative result of musicians have the same level as historical sources in general.

There are several limitations in this research. First, this research does not accommodate steady language. The lyrics used in songs in one era may have different meanings in another, making it difficult to accurately identify the historical context. Second, this research also has not accommodated listeners' responses in the current era, so the motives behind similar lyrics cannot be identified. Third, this research has not yet obtained historical validity which might cause the song lyrics to contain elements of fiction or artistic expression rather than historical representation. Further research is needed to examine the language, listener responses, and historians of the song lyrics using a multidisciplinary approach to produce more accurate data.

## CONCLUSION

Numerous songs attempt to record past events. This is a good thing for studying history because at least the various important events that have occurred will be remembered by people as long as there are people singing the song. Many phenomena that exist in society are recorded through songs. Of course, this can be discussed further regarding the function of song lyrics as a historical source. But history is a very open science, anything can be used as a historical source as long as it is able to help narrate the events that have occurred. Song lyrics can strengthen written historical narratives, proving that an event has more value in the eyes of society. Songs also help the readers better understand the events narrated, like a spirit that enters the body, animating something dry and dead. There are so many songs whose background is Indonesia in the past, so historians must put them to good use to enrich the historical narratives they write. Methodologically, it may be not easy to make songs a direct historical source. However, as with other sources, steps are still needed to interpret the sources. Interpreting song lyrics can be much more difficult than interpreting newspaper reports. If it cannot be the main source for methodological reasons, at least through songs the stories of history remain eternal as long as the songs are still sung.

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