



Decentralization vs Cultural Centralization: The Paradox of Dangdut Koplo in Indonesian Popular Music

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Abstract

This study analyzes the paradox of decentralization and cultural centralization in contemporary Indonesian popular music through the case of dangdut koplo. Although post-2014 regional autonomy and digital technologies have expanded access to music production across Indonesia, this research shows the consolidation of a standardized Javanese koplo format as a dominant national template. Using multi-sited ethnography (2021-2023) in East Java, Makassar, Ambon, and East Kalimantan, combined with digital analysis of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram, the study traces how rhythmic codification, platform circulation, and modular adaptation enable koplo to function as a musical lingua franca. Findings demonstrate that decentralized production infrastructures coexist with aesthetic convergence: standardized kendang patterns, visual framing, and mixing practices are widely reproduced, while regional melodic and vocal elements are layered onto a stable rhythmic structure. Drawing on Raymond Williams' concept of cultural centrality, Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity, and media ecology theory, this study proposes the concept of "standardized differentiation" to explain how structural uniformity coexists with patterned local variation. The research argues that digital and administrative decentralization reconfigure, rather than dissolve, cultural hierarchy in Indonesia's contemporary music landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

The sun began to set in Tulungagung, East Java, as I observed Mbak Yani—a 28-year-old dangdut koplo singer—preparing for her performance on a digital streaming platform. In the corner of her room, which she had converted into a mini studio, she set up a ring light, adjusted the angle of her phone camera, and ensured her internet connection was stable. "I used to perform in villages, but now I often perform here," she said with a smile, pointing to her phone screen.

Mbak Yani's experience reflects a fundamental transformation in the landscape of contemporary Indonesian dangdut koplo music. During my ethnographic research from 2021 to 2023, I witnessed how digital technology not only changed the way music is produced and consumed but also created an intriguing paradox in the context of Indonesia's cultural decentralization.

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Yet Mbak Yani's transition from village stages to live-stream platforms does not simply reflect technological democratization. It reveals a deeper negotiation between individual artistic agency and platform-driven visibility regimes. Her decisions about tempo, lighting, song selection, and kendang intensity are not purely aesthetic choices; they are shaped by algorithmic metrics, audience engagement patterns, and the pressure to conform to recognizable koplo templates.

While digital platforms promise decentralization by enabling performers to bypass traditional intermediaries, they simultaneously impose new forms of infrastructural control. Algorithmic ranking systems reward rhythmic peaks, standardized visual framing, and familiar sonic patterns. As a result, performers like Mbak Yani operate within a constrained field where deviation risks invisibility. The paradox, therefore, is not merely between decentralization and centralization, but between distributed participation and algorithmic standardization.

On one hand, the democratization of technology has opened up opportunities for the emergence of music production hubs in various remote corners of the archipelago. However, as I observed while following the journey of the music group "Surya Nada" from Banyuwangi to various regional music festivals, the standardization of Javanese koplo formats has grown stronger. Mas Wahyu, the group's kendang player, admitted: "Now everyone wants koplo, from Sabang to Merauke. But it's always Javanese koplo."

This phenomenon becomes increasingly complex as I observe the dynamics at the "Barokah Audio" recording studio in Probolinggo. There, I witnessed how traditional Madurese songs are transformed following the standardized koplo template. Mr. Hendra, the studio owner, explained: "The market now wants something similar to New Pallapa. If we create something different, it attracts less interest."

Over the past twenty years, scholarship on Indonesian popular music has grown. Studies on dangdut have examined its socio-political roles, gender dynamics, and moral debates [1], [2], [3]. Weintraub [1], [2] analyzes dangdut koplo as both genre and counter-genre, emphasizing its East Javanese roots and its negotiation with national cultural politics. Baulch [3] places Indonesian popular music in the context of technological changes and class formation, highlighting how genres emerge through media infrastructures. Other scholars explore globalization and digital mediation of koplo via platforms like TikTok. Broader frameworks address articulation and hybridity in Indonesia's post-authoritarian cultural landscapes.

Beyond genre-specific studies, theoretical work on cultural centrality and selective tradition [4], hybridity and the "third space" [5], and media ecology [6] has supplied useful concepts for understanding cultural changes in technological settings. In Indonesia, political decentralization after regional autonomy is widely discussed in policy studies. But its impact on aesthetic development in popular music is underexplored. While earlier studies provide insights into dangdut's social meanings, media circulation, and genre assessment, they do not systematically examine how decentralization can create new cultural centers.

Existing scholarship does not address how digital infrastructure, production standards, and regional autonomy interact to form a dominant musical style nationally. Dangdut koplo is often analyzed as a regional genre popularized by circulation and hybridization. However, there is little focus on how koplo's Javanese rhythms become accepted as a national standard and function as a musical lingua franca across regions. This creates a paradox: during administrative decentralization and technological democratization, a standardized aesthetic center is actually consolidating.

This paradox raises a research problem: How can decentralization generate cultural centralization? More specifically, how do democratized music production and digital distribution make one regional style dominant nationwide? Instead of assuming decentralization always brings diversity, this study views it as a field where new hierarchies and aesthetic norms may emerge. This research contributes to Indonesian popular music studies by offering a new theoretical lens for understanding digital change, regional autonomy, and cultural power after 2014.

2. METHODS

This research employs the multi-sited ethnographic approach developed by Marcus [7], conducted during the 2021-2023 period, with a focus on in-depth observation of dangdut koplo's transformation in the contemporary Indonesian musical landscape. Fieldwork was organized through purposive and theoretical sampling, selecting locations that represent key nodes in the contemporary koplo ecosystem. East Java (Tulungagung, Probolinggo, and Banyuwangi) was chosen as the historical and structural center of dangdut koplo production, where the genre's rhythmic template and production conventions are most consolidated. Additional sites in Eastern Indonesia, including Ambon and Makassar, were selected to examine how the koplo format is appropriated and adapted in culturally distinct regions beyond Java. This geographical spread was designed to capture maximum variation in regional music traditions while tracing the circulation of a standardized koplo template across decentralized production hubs. Rather than representing statistical distribution, site selection followed an analytical logic aimed at understanding how decentralization operates within interconnected yet asymmetrical musical infrastructures.

Data collection combined in-depth qualitative interviews [8], participant observation [9], and digital content analysis [10]. A total of 10 key informants were involved in this study, selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Informants consisted of 2 music producers, 5 singers, 2 instrumentalists (primarily kendang players and arrangers), and 1 studio owner. Selection criteria included (1) active involvement in koplo production between 2018-2023, (2) participation in cross-regional collaborations or digital distribution, and (3) recognized influence within their local music networks. This sampling strategy ensured representation of both production centers in East Java and adaptive nodes in Eastern Indonesia.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility while maintaining analytical focus. Each interview lasted between 60-120 minutes and, where possible, follow-up conversations were conducted to clarify emerging themes. Interview questions addressed topics such as: (1) perceptions of market demand and format standardization; (2) adaptation of local musical elements into koplo templates; (3) technological tools used in production; and (4) experiences of digital distribution through streaming and social media platforms.

Digital content analysis focused on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube as primary circulation platforms. Approximately 50 digital artifacts were analyzed, including live-stream performances, koplo drum tutorials, studio production reels, and viral performance clips uploaded between 2021 and 2023. Selection criteria included high engagement metrics (views, shares, comments) and explicit labeling of content as "koplo" or regional adaptations of koplo. This digital corpus enabled examination of how aesthetic standards circulate, are imitated, and become normalized across geographically dispersed production sites.

Field engagement was conducted through repeated site visits lasting between one and three weeks per location, complemented by continuous digital observation throughout the

research period. This combination of offline immersion and online tracking enables longitudinal analysis of shifts in production practices and aesthetic negotiations over time.

A thick description approach was used to explain not only practices but also their underlying contexts and meanings [11], integrating empirical observations with theoretical analysis. Data triangulation was conducted through systematic cross-verification across three primary data sources: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital content analysis [12]. First, observational fieldnotes from studio sessions and live performances were compared with interview narratives to identify consistencies and discrepancies between practitioners' stated intentions and actual production practices. Second, claims made by informants regarding format standardization, market demand, and technological influence were examined against digital artifacts, including recorded performances, arrangement patterns, and platform engagement metrics. Third, patterns identified in digital circulation were traced back to production contexts through follow-up interviews and site visits.

The analysis process was conducted iteratively, allowing for the development and adjustment of research focus alongside new field findings [13]. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and fieldnotes from participant observation were organized chronologically. The initial stage involved open coding to identify recurring concepts related to format standardization, technological mediation, regional adaptation, and market negotiation. Codes were generated directly from the data without imposing predefined categories. In the second stage, axial coding was employed to examine relationships between categories, particularly concerning how decentralization, digital infrastructure, and aesthetic centralization intersected in practice. At this stage, theoretical concepts from Raymond Williams (cultural centrality), Homi K. Bhabha (hybridity and third space), and Matthew Fuller (media ecology) were used as analytical lenses to interpret emerging patterns. Digital content artifacts were analyzed through pattern recognition and comparative analysis, focusing on recurring rhythmic structures, arrangement templates, visual staging conventions, and platform engagement metrics. Rather than relying solely on frequency counts, analysis emphasized how repetition and imitation contributed to the normalization of *koplo* as a standardized format.

Coding and categorization were conducted manually to maintain interpretive proximity to the data. The iterative movement between empirical material and theoretical reflection allowed themes to be refined progressively throughout the research period. This analytical process ultimately led to the formulation of the concept of "standardized differentiation" as a synthesis of empirical findings and theoretical engagement.

By tracing identical or near-identical *koplo* rhythmic templates, arrangement structures, and visual grammars across geographically distant sites (East Java, Makassar, Ambon), the study was able to compare infrastructural dispersion with aesthetic convergence. The paradox was therefore not treated as a theoretical assumption but as an empirical question tested through cross-regional pattern mapping, triangulated interview accounts, and digital artifact analysis. Through this design, the research demonstrates how decentralized production infrastructures coexist with standardized aesthetic reproduction, enabling a systematic explanation of how cultural centralization emerges from distributed participation rather than institutional imposition.

Generative AI tools (OpenAI) were used in the manuscript preparation process to support language refinement and organizational clarity. No AI tools were used in data collection, data analysis, or interpretation. All empirical findings and theoretical arguments were developed independently by the author.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Empirical observation in Mbak Yani's live-streaming studio in Tulungagung reveals how this process operates in digital musical space. During repeated visits between 2021 and 2023, a recurring visual configuration was documented: a centrally framed singer positioned against a neutral or softly illuminated background, accompanied by LED ring lighting that produces a bright frontal facial glow, with a visible kendang setup placed slightly off-center but within the camera frame. Similar configurations were observed in 18 out of 25 live-stream sessions analyzed from East Javanese koplo performers on TikTok and YouTube.

The use of ring lights, tight medium shots (waist-up framing), and minimal background distraction were not merely technical adjustments, but part of an emergent aesthetic norm. When asked about her setup, Mbak Yani stated, "*Kalau tidak pakai lighting seperti ini, terlihat bukan koplo live yang profesional.*" This suggests the internalization of a standardized visual grammar. Digital content analysis further shows that high-engagement koplo streams (above 50,000 views) consistently employ similar framing conventions and sound mixing patterns—particularly the prominence of syncopated kendang beats in the audio balance.

Comment sections also reinforce this aesthetic centrality. Phrases such as "*koplonya mantap,*" "*sound-nya seperti New Pallapa,*" or "*kendangnya harus lebih nendang*" frequently appear, indicating audience expectations tied to established koplo benchmarks. These patterns demonstrate how digital space, rather than functioning as a pluralistic arena, reproduces a centered aesthetic regime in which Javanese koplo sound and visual presentation become naturalized as the dominant template. In this sense, cultural centrality is not abstract, but materially reproduced through lighting choices, camera framing, audio mixing hierarchies, and algorithmically rewarded repetition.

Observations at Barokah Audio Studio in Probolinggo demonstrate how hybridization operates in concrete production practices. Traditional Madurese songs recorded in the studio are not simply reproduced; they are rearranged to fit a koplo rhythmic template. In several sessions observed between 2022 and 2023, producers retained Madurese melodic ornamentation and vocal timbre, but replaced original percussion patterns with syncopated koplo kendang structures. Tempo was often increased by 10-15 BPM to match common koplo performance energy, and bass lines were simplified to emphasize the off-beat accents characteristic of East Javanese koplo.

Pak Hendra explained that market demand requires arrangements to sound "similar to New Pallapa," referring to New Pallapa as a national benchmark. This reference point shapes production decisions: intro sections are shortened, drum breaks are inserted before chorus repetition, and electronic keyboard textures are layered to create a fuller stage-like sound suitable for digital streaming circulation. However, certain local markers—such as Madurese lyrical diction and melodic contour—are deliberately maintained to signal regional identity.

This process reflects what Homi K. Bhabha conceptualizes as the "third space," but in this context, hybridization is not an abstract cultural condition; it is a technical and negotiated arrangement strategy. The studio becomes a site where rhythmic standardization coexists with selective preservation of local musical elements. Hybridization, therefore, emerges through concrete decisions about tempo, percussion layering, melodic retention, and digital mixing rather than through a simple blending of "tradition" and "modernity."

The manifestation of hybridization processes at Barokah Audio Studio reflects the complex dynamics in transforming traditional Madurese music. The adaptation of traditional

Madurese musical elements into koplo templates becomes the primary practice marking this process. Producers and musicians at the studio creatively integrate Madurese melodic patterns, vocal ornamentations, and characteristic instrumentation into standardized koplo rhythmic structures and arrangements. This process isn't merely mechanical transplantation but involves a deep understanding of both musical traditions. Musical decisions are primarily initiated by the arranger and studio producer, who determines the basic tempo, rhythmic template, and structural layout before recording begins. In several observed sessions, adaptation occurred in its conventional tempo. The arranger then proposed a tempo increase to align with standard koplo energy levels [14], [15].

Instrumentally, electronic keyboard layers are added to thicken the harmonic texture, replacing or doubling traditional instrumentation. However, specific Madurase vocal ornamentations and melodic contours are deliberately preserved to maintain recognizable regional identity. Thus, hybridization at Barokah Audio is not an abstract blending of traditions but a series of concrete technical decisions involving tempo recalibration, rhythmic substitution, arrangement restructuring, and negotiated authority among producer, arranger, instrumentalist, and vocalist. The studio becomes a site where power, market logic, and musical creativity intersect in everyday production practice.

Meanwhile, negotiation between market demands and local identity becomes a crucial aspect of this hybridization process. The studio must continuously balance listeners' expectations for contemporary koplo sound with the need to maintain local distinctiveness. Musicians and producers at Barokah Audio develop creative strategies to accommodate both demands, for example, by maintaining the use of certain traditional instruments or characteristic Madurese melodic patterns but modified to fit contemporary koplo aesthetics. This negotiation process often results in unexpected innovations in music production and arrangement techniques.

Furthermore, activities in this studio produce new expressive forms that transcend simple traditional-modern categorization. The music produced can no longer be rigidly categorized as "Madurese music" or "koplo music" but becomes a hybrid entity with its own characteristics. Young musicians in the studio often experiment by combining seemingly contradictory elements - such as using modern synthesizers to reproduce traditional ornamentation or adapting koplo kendang patterns to accompany traditional Madurese melodies. Such experimentation creates a new musical vocabulary that simultaneously roots itself in tradition while remaining relevant to contemporary tastes. Through this process, Barokah Audio isn't merely a place for music production but evolves into a cultural laboratory where new musical identities are continuously negotiated and recreated.

3.2. Discussions

Raymond Williams provides a highly relevant conceptual framework for analyzing cultural transformation phenomena, including in the context of the contemporary dangdut koplo music landscape. Through concepts such as "cultural centrality" and "selective tradition," Williams helps to understand how certain cultural practices are naturalized and made into dominant standards in society [16]. In this sense, cultural centrality emerges not through consensus alone, but through structured decisions about what counts as representative, modern, or commercially viable.

Williams' concept of "selective tradition" is also relevant in analyzing this phenomenon. According to Williams, "selective tradition" is a process where certain elements of culture are selected, interpreted, and passed down as the most important or representative. This process often ignores or marginalizes other elements that are considered inconsistent with the dominant narrative.

Applied to the contemporary dangdut koplo ecosystem, selective tradition becomes visible in the way certain rhythmic, visual, and performative elements are elevated as normative while others are discarded. Studio observations and digital content analysis reveal that producers prioritize syncopated kendang intensities, shortened song introductions, compressed dynamic ranges, and visually standardized framing because these elements are considered platform-compatible and marketable. Conversely, slower melodic ornamentations, extended instrumental preludes, region-specific rhythmic deviations, or complex pentatonic inflections are often reduced or eliminated. These elements are frequently described by producers as “kurang masuk market” or “tidak cocok untuk TikTok.” The elimination is therefore not accidental—it is a strategic filtering shaped by engagement metrics, audience retention data, and expectations formed around nationally recognizable koplo templates.

In the context of Dangdut Koplo live streaming, we can observe how certain visual and performative aesthetics are selected and naturalized as part of the “selective tradition.” For example, the use of ring lights, specific camera angles, and distinctive performance styles becomes standard, considered “natural” or “must-have” in live streaming. Williams explains, “The selective tradition creates a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present” [16]. In other words, the aesthetics chosen and repeated in live streaming not only reflect current preferences but also shape narratives about how dangdut koplo “should” be presented. Williams’ framework helps reveal that aesthetic uniformity is not simply cultural preference but the effect of systematic exclusion: local musical complexities that resist rhythmic codification or algorithmic optimization gradually disappear from mainstream circulation. Cultural centrality, therefore, is reproduced through ongoing acts of filtration embedded within digital production and distribution infrastructures.

As Williams states, “Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its shape, its purposes, and its meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and arts and learning” [4]. In this context, Mbak Yani’s live-streaming studio exemplifies how “ordinary culture” is expressed and adapted in new contexts, while continuing to reinforce or challenge existing norms.

Fuller’s theoretical framework of media ecology provides a critical perspective for understanding how technological infrastructure not only facilitates but fundamentally shapes the transformation of traditional music in the context of digitalization [6]. This dynamic becomes visible in the digital trajectory of the Surya Nada group. Between January and September 2022, five live performance clips uploaded to YouTube accumulated between 120,000 and 450,000 views—figures significantly higher than their pre-2020 offline documentation, which rarely exceeded 20,000 views. The experience of the Surya Nada group in facing national music market demands becomes a concrete example of how digital distribution networks have created a new landscape in music circulation.

However, the implications of these adjustments extend beyond technical optimization. Platform infrastructures do not merely mediate circulation; they establish the parameters of aesthetic legitimacy. Loudness normalization, algorithmic ranking, and engagement metrics collectively generate what may be termed a metric-driven aesthetic regime—one that privileges rhythmic intensity, compressed dynamics, visual clarity, and structural repetition. Within this regime, deviation from recognizable koplo peaks risks algorithmic marginalization.

In this sense, technology functions not simply as a tool but as a governing infrastructure that reorganizes artistic agency. Producers internalize platform metrics as compositional guidelines, and aesthetic conformity becomes a rational survival strategy within visibility hierarchies. The standardization observed across geographically dispersed studios is

therefore not accidental convergence, but the effect of algorithmically structured incentives.

Through streaming platforms and social media, Koplo formats produced in local studios can now easily circulate beyond their traditional geographical boundaries. Streaming platform analytics also show geographical diffusion beyond East Java. Audience data from YouTube Studio indicates significant viewership from South Sulawesi, North Sumatra, and Maluku, regions outside Koplo's original production center. However, despite regional spread, the rhythmic template remains consistent with East Javanese koplo conventions. This suggests that digital distribution expands reach while reinforcing a standardized sonic format.

In this sense, digital connectivity does not merely facilitate circulation; it produces feedback loops in which algorithmic reward systems privilege certain rhythmic intensities, visual framings, and structural repetitions. Producers respond to these metrics by internalizing platform logic into arrangement decisions. Media ecology, therefore, becomes observable not as abstract infrastructure, but as a measurable pattern linking engagement statistics, algorithmic amplification, and aesthetic standardization.

In the context of recording and production technology, sonic standardization becomes an inevitable consequence of the democratization of digital music production devices. The use of the same Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs), similar plugins, and standard production templates across various studios has created a kind of homogenization in sound characteristics. As observed at Surya Nada studio, the use of identical presets and samples for koplo production has created a kind of uniform 'sonic language'. However, this standardization isn't a one-way process; local producers often find creative ways to adapt and modify these standard templates according to their local needs and tastes.

More fundamentally, digital infrastructure has shaped aesthetic parameters and production practices in the local music industry. The demand for the koplo format "from Sabang to Merauke" faced by Surya Nada reflects how technological infrastructure has created certain expectations about how music should sound and be produced [3]. Music streaming platforms, for instance, with their recommendation algorithms and playlist systems, indirectly encourage format standardization to maximize listener engagement. Producers in local studios must align their productions with platform-imposed technical parameters such as loudness normalization and frequency response optimization. These parameters operate as an invisible regulatory mechanism, subtly disciplining sonic choices toward platform-compatible uniformity.

The complex interaction between technology, production practices, and market expectations creates a dynamic media ecosystem where musical transformation occurs. During field visits in 2022, the group's arranger demonstrated how mixing decisions were adjusted specifically for YouTube's loudness normalization system. Earlier recordings (pre-2019) displayed wider dynamic range, with softer vocal passages and less compressed percussion. However, more recent productions show heavier compression and boosted low-frequency emphasis to ensure that *kendang* accents remain prominent after platform normalization. As the sound engineer explained, "*Kalau tidak ditekan dan dinaikkan bassnya, di YouTube terdengar kalah dengan video lain.*" Surya Nada's experience illustrates how local musicians and producers must continuously negotiate with standardization demands while seeking space for their creative expression and local identity.

These observations demonstrate how a single technological shift—platform-based circulation governed by algorithmic ranking and loudness normalization—triggers cascading adjustments in mixing techniques, arrangement structure, rehearsal strategy, and touring circuits. This phenomenon affirms Fuller's argument about how media operate within

complex networks of relations, where changes in one technological aspect can produce broad transformations in cultural practices and social formations.

These dynamics resonate with broader global debates on platformization, where digital platforms restructure cultural production through data extraction, algorithmic recommendation, and engagement optimization. Scholars of platformization argue that cultural visibility is increasingly governed by metrics rather than by institutional gatekeepers. In such systems, creative practices are recalibrated toward algorithmic compatibility.

The Indonesian koplo case illustrates how decentralized production does not necessarily dismantle hierarchy, but rather relocates it within platform infrastructures. What appears as grassroots digital empowerment operates within architectures designed by transnational corporations, whose algorithms prioritize reproducibility, predictability, and scalable engagement. The aesthetic convergence of koplo, therefore, mirrors global patterns in which platform governance reshapes cultural diversity into metric-compatible formats.

The synthesis of these three theoretical perspectives—Williams' cultural centrality, Bhabha's hybridity, and media ecology—directly addresses this study's central research question: how does technological and administrative decentralization generate cultural centralization? Empirical findings suggest that decentralization expands access to production tools and distribution platforms (media ecology), enabling geographically dispersed actors such as Mbak Yani to produce and circulate content independently. However, this infrastructural openness operates within algorithmic and market logics that privilege recognizable and repeatable formats.

Within this system, Koplo's rhythmic and visual template becomes the most adaptable and platform-compatible structure. As producers and performers seek visibility and engagement, they adopt standardized kendang patterns, mixing hierarchies and visual framing conventions that align with dominant benchmarks. This process reflects what Williams conceptualizes as cultural centrality: a specific aesthetic form becomes naturalized as normative through repetition and institutional reinforcement. At the same time, local actors do not simply imitate; they insert regional melodic or lyrical elements into the koplo template, generating hybrid configurations consistent with Bhabha's notion of negotiated cultural identity.

The paradox, therefore, emerges from the interaction of these three mechanisms. Decentralization increases the number of producers (infrastructural dispersion), but algorithmic amplification and market expectations reward standardized forms (aesthetic convergence). Hybridization does not disrupt this convergence; instead, it operates within the boundaries of the dominant rhythmic framework. In this way, democratized access to production does not dissolve hierarchy but reconfigures it: cultural centralization is reproduced through distributed participation rather than imposed from a single institutional center.

This theoretical framework also helps understand why phenomena observed in the field cannot be explained solely through technological determinism or political economy. When Mbak Yani transitions from village stages to digital platforms, or when Pak Hendra transforms Madurese songs following koplo aesthetics, they aren't merely responding to market demands or adopting new technology. They are engaged in a complex process involving identity negotiation, creative adaptation, and participation in shaping the contemporary musical landscape.

Thus, the paradox between administrative decentralization and cultural centralization in contemporary Indonesian popular music can be understood as a manifestation of inherent

tensions in the digital modernization process. The experiences of music practitioners in the field demonstrate how power, identity, and materiality interact in shaping a complex musical ecology, where the democratization of access doesn't automatically result in the democratization of form.

3.2.1. Decentralization and the Reconfiguration of the Music Industry

The structural transformation in Indonesia's music industry post-regional autonomy offers a complex narrative about how administrative decentralization implies a reconfiguration of the cultural landscape. Ethnographic observations across various regions of Indonesia reveal how regional autonomy not only created space for the emergence of local recording industries but also facilitated the formation of distinct musical ecologies that remain connected to mainstream currents [17]. Ethnographic observations conducted between 2021 and 2023 confirm this shift: small-scale studios in Tulungagung, Probolinggo, Makassar, and Ambon now operate with relatively affordable digital equipment, enabling localized production without dependence on national labels.

The democratization of music production technology further catalyzes this transformation, creating what we might call "infrastructural decentralization." In Mbak Yani's mini studio in Tulungagung, a laptop with standard DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) software becomes the main instrument of musical production, replacing more expensive analog recording equipment. However, as observed in daily practice, the democratization of access to these production tools presents an interesting paradox: standardization of production tools drives homogenization of creative output. This phenomenon reflects what Theodor Adorno conceptualized as "pseudo-individualization" in the context of the cultural industry, where superficial variation masks fundamental standardization [18].

The emergence of independent music ecosystems across various regions of Indonesia further complicates these dynamics. In Yogyakarta, the Bantul-based "Digital Collective" community demonstrates how digital technology enables the formation of alternative production and distribution networks that transcend conventional industry structures. Members emphasize creative autonomy and cross-genre experimentation. However, field observations conducted in 2022 indicate that even within this ostensibly alternative space, Koplo's rhythmic logic remains structurally influential.

This indicates that the community simultaneously challenges and reinforces centralization. It challenges industrial centralization by operating independently from national labels and distributing content through self-managed channels. Yet it reinforces aesthetic centralization by adopting structural features that align with algorithmically favored koplo formats. Rather than producing a radically divergent sonic model, Digital Collective adapts within the boundaries of a nationally dominant rhythmic template.

Analysis of music production and circulation patterns across various regions reveals the emergence of what we can call "networked locality"—where local musical expressions are no longer geographically isolated, but rather connected in complex networks of digital exchange [19]. In Makassar, for example, the "Digital Nusantara" studio regularly collaborates with musicians from various regions of Indonesia through digital platforms, creating fusion sounds that integrate local elements with contemporary musical trends. This phenomenon illustrates how digital technology not only facilitates music production but also reshapes our conception of locality and authenticity in the context of cultural production.

It's important to note that the decentralization of the music industry doesn't automatically result in the comprehensive democratization of Indonesia's musical landscape. As observed in field research, access to digital technology and infrastructure remains uneven, creating what Manuel Castells [20] calls a "digital divide" in the context of cultural production. In

regions with more limited digital infrastructure, musicians and producers must develop unique adaptive strategies, often resulting in unexpected creative innovations.

Nevertheless, the emergence of independent music ecosystems across various regions of Indonesia still represents a paradigmatic shift in how music is produced, distributed, and consumed. This transformation is not merely technological or economic, but also cultural—fundamentally changing the relationship between producers, performers, and audiences in Indonesia's contemporary music landscape. When Mbak Yani conducts live streaming from her modest studio, she isn't simply adopting a new medium for musical performance but is also participating in a fundamental reconfiguration of how music is understood and articulated in the digital era.

3.2.2. Koplo as Musical Lingua Franca

In the contemporary Indonesian music landscape, dangdut koplo has undergone a significant transformation from a mere regional genre into a nationally adopted musical language [21]. Musicological analysis of nationally adapted koplo elements reveals interesting complexities in the process of musical standardization and differentiation. The koplo drum pattern, which serves as the main sonic identity of this genre, exhibits characteristics that Raymond Williams refers to as "dominant emergent"—a cultural form that emerges from a specific context but is capable of transcending its geographical and cultural boundaries [7].

Observations at the "Barokah Audio" studio in Probolinggo reveal how the koplo drum pattern has undergone systematic codification, creating a kind of "musical grammar" that can be adapted in various cultural contexts. Mr. Hendra, the producer, demonstrates how the basic koplo pattern—with its characteristic syncopated rhythm and distinct accentuation—has become a flexible yet identifiable template. "This is not just a drumming pattern," he explains, "but has become a language understood by musicians everywhere."

Dangdut koplo presents a musical structure that has undergone significant transformation from conventional dangdut roots. The distinctive characteristic of koplo lies in its polyrhythmic kendang (drum) patterns, with emphasis on syncopated beats and complex percussive improvisation. These sonic elements form what Wintraub [2] refers to as a "musical template" that has been widely adopted in contemporary Indonesian popular music production.

The role of social media in the circulation of koplo music trends offers a crucial analytical dimension in understanding the naturalization process of this musical format. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube don't merely function as distribution channels, but more fundamentally, shape what Pierre Bourdieu conceptualized as the "field of cultural production" in the digital space. Viral koplo drum tutorials on social media, for instance, not only transmit musical techniques but also codify certain aesthetic standards as performative norms [22].

In East Kalimantan, the transformation of local popular music through the koplo format appropriation demonstrates further complexity. The "Borneo Ethnic" group, for instance, integrates koplo drum patterns with Dayak vocal modalities and instrumentation, creating a sonic hybridity that represents what Stuart Hall conceptualizes as "articulation"—a contingent connection between different cultural elements forming a new unity [23].

Eastern Indonesia offers the most vivid example of how koplo operates as a musical lingua franca in the context of extreme cultural diversity. In Ambon, observations of the production process at the "Maluku Digital" studio reveal how local musicians articulate their regional identity through selective appropriation of the koplo format. As observed by Mr. Alex, a local producer: "We use the koplo beat, but the musical soul remains Malukan."

This phenomenon underlines an interesting paradox in the musical standardization process: the wider the adoption of the koplo format, the more diverse its local manifestations become. Field observations across four regions between 2021-2023 demonstrate this patterned variation. While tempo range (100-118 BPM), syncopated kendang breaks, and build-up structures remain consistent, melodic contour, vocal timbre, and linguistic delivery vary significantly by region. In East Java, koplo productions emphasize aggressive kendang improvisation designed for crowd interaction. In Madura (Probolinggo), traditional pentatonic melodic contours and nasal vocal ornamentation are layered onto standardized koplo rhythms. In Makassar, Bugis-Makassar lyrical phrasing and melismatic vocal lines are inserted into koplo's structural template, often accompanied by electronic bass enhancements. Meanwhile, in Ambon, church-influenced harmonic progressions are adapted into koplo tempo frameworks, producing a distinct fusion between eastern Indonesian vocal style and Javanese rhythmic intensity. However, as Arjun Appadurai argues, format standardization does not automatically result in cultural homogenization. Instead, it creates what we might call "standardized differentiation"—where standardized musical frameworks facilitate the articulation of cultural differences in new and unexpected ways [24].

Table 1. Regional Pattern of Koplo Adaptation.
[Source: Fieldwork Analysis]

Region	Structural Rhythm	Melodic Source	Vocal Style	Distinctive Feature
East Java	105-115 BPM	Dangdut campursari	& High-energy projection	Aggressive drum improvisation
Madura	100-112 BPM, standardized koplo template	Madurase pentatonic	Nasal ornamentation	Traditional melodic inflection
Makassar	100-112 BPM	Bugis-Makassar modal phrases	Melismatic	Electronic bass layer
Ambon	100-110 BPM, koplo drum loop	Church-influenced harmony	Choir-style harmonization	Gospel chord progression fusion

This analysis leads to a more nuanced understanding of how Koplo operates as a musical lingua franca in the contemporary Indonesian context. More than just a genre or style, koplo has become a kind of musical "operating system" that enables the articulation of local identity while facilitating cross-cultural musical communication in the digital era.

In the contemporary Indonesian music landscape, the transformation of dangdut koplo from a regional genre into a musical lingua franca presents an interesting case study on the dynamics of cultural standardization and differentiation [25]. Observations across various studios from Probolinggo to Ambon demonstrate how the koplo format operates as an adaptive musical framework, enabling the articulation of local identity while facilitating cross-cultural communication. This phenomenon confirms theoretical arguments from various scholars - from Williams' concept of "dominant emergent," Bhabha's "mimicry," to Hall's "articulation" - about how format standardization does not automatically result in homogenization, but rather creates what can be termed as "standardized differentiation." Through digital platforms and decentralized music production networks, Koplo has evolved beyond its status as a music genre to become a kind of musical operating system that enables creative negotiation between national market demands and local identity expression. In this context, koplo serves not only as a medium of musical communication but also as an arena where the tension between standardization and cultural differentiation is continuously played out and renegotiated in Indonesia's evolving musical landscape.

Mechanistically, Koplo becomes a musical lingua franca through three interrelated processes: rhythmic codification, digital circulation, and modular adaptation. First, rhythmic codification occurs through the stabilization of core kendang patterns (syncopated off-beat accents, pre-chorus build-up rolls, and 8-16 bar climactic breaks) that function as a recognizable structural constant across regions. Second, digital circulation—particularly through short-form video platforms and live-stream performances—amplifies tracks that conform to these recognizable rhythmic peaks, thereby reinforcing their reproducibility across geographically dispersed studios. Third, modular adaptation enables local musicians to insert region-specific melodic scales, dialects, and vocal techniques onto the standardized rhythmic base without disrupting structural intelligibility [26], [27].

A comparative mapping of adaptation patterns across regions further clarifies this mechanism. In East Java, differentiation occurs primarily at the level of kendang improvisational intensity; in Probolinggo (Madura), differentiation appears in pentatonic melodic inflections and nasal vocal timbre; in Makassar, articulation emerges through melismatic phrasing and electronic bass layering; in East Kalimantan, Dayak vocal modalities and indigenous instrumentation are superimposed onto koplo's rhythmic frame; while in Ambon, gospel-influenced harmonic progressions and choir-style backing vocals modify the tonal atmosphere without altering tempo structure. Across these cases, rhythmic grammar remains stable while melodic, linguistic, and timbral components vary systematically.

This patterned layering demonstrates that koplo functions as a shared structural code: musicians from different cultural backgrounds can communicate musically because the rhythmic infrastructure is mutually intelligible, even as expressive surfaces remain locally distinct. In this sense, koplo operates linguistically—not by erasing accent, but by providing a grammatical base upon which regional “accents” are articulated [28].

Furthermore, the consolidation of Koplo aesthetics unfolds within global platform architectures that are neither locally governed nor culturally neutral. Although koplo functions as a national musical lingua franca, its circulation and visibility are mediated by algorithmic systems developed outside Indonesia. This raises critical questions about digital colonialism: to what extent does decentralization occur within infrastructural dependencies that remain globally centralized? The paradox thus deepens—cultural centralization emerges not through state institutions, but through participation in transnational platform ecosystems.

4. CONCLUSION

This study systematically answers the three central research questions posed at the outset. First, regarding how decentralization reshapes the Indonesian music industry, the findings demonstrate that administrative and technological decentralization redistributed production capacity geographically but simultaneously reproduced aesthetic centralization through shared digital infrastructures and rhythmic templates. Second, concerning the mechanism by which koplo became a national musical lingua franca, the research shows that rhythmic codification, platform-based circulation, and modular adaptability enabled koplo to function as a mutually intelligible musical grammar across regions. Third, in relation to the paradox between standardization and differentiation, the study confirms that structural uniformity at the rhythmic level coexists with patterned differentiation in melody, language, vocal style, and timbre.

This research reveals an interesting paradox in the development of dangdut koplo in Indonesia during the 2014-2024 period, where the decentralization of the music industry resulted in cultural centralization. Through comprehensive ethnographic studies in various locations - from Mbak Yani's mini studio in Tulungagung to "Maluku Digital" in Ambon - this

research demonstrates how the democratization of technology and decentralization of music production strengthened the position of Javanese koplo as the dominant format in contemporary Indonesian popular music.

The main findings of the research show that koplo's transformation from a regional genre into a national musical lingua franca was mediated by three key factors: digital infrastructure that facilitated the circulation of musical formats beyond geographical boundaries, standardization of production tools and practices that created sonic homogenization, and the ability of the koplo format to function as an adaptive framework enabling the articulation of local identities. This phenomenon is explained through the synthesis of three theoretical perspectives: Raymond Williams' concept of cultural centrality, which explains the naturalization process of dominant formats; Homi Bhabha's hybridity theory, which helps understand identity negotiation in the third space; and the media ecology approach, which reveals the role of technological infrastructure in shaping cultural practices.

The significance of this research lies in its intervention in global debates within the sociology of music concerning decentralization, platformization, and cultural power. Prevailing theories of cultural decentralization often assume that the diffusion of production tools and digital access leads to increased pluralism and aesthetic diversification. In contrast, the concept of "standardized differentiation" proposed in this study challenges that assumption. The findings demonstrate that decentralization at the infrastructural level does not automatically dismantle aesthetic hierarchy; rather, it can reconfigure hierarchy through algorithmic governance and market-driven selection.

By showing how distributed production across Indonesian regions converges toward a stable rhythmic and visual koplo template, this study complicates the binary opposition between centralization and decentralization. Instead of producing fragmentation, digital decentralization generates patterned convergence within platform-compatible frameworks. "Standardized differentiation" thus reframes decentralization not as dispersion of power, but as the multiplication of participants operating within shared algorithmic constraints. In doing so, this research contributes to music sociology by theorizing how aesthetic uniformity can emerge from distributed participation—extending discussions of platformization and challenging celebratory narratives of digital cultural democratization.

Methodologically, this research contributes to the development of multi-sited ethnography by demonstrating how dispersed local studios can be analyzed not as isolated cultural units but as interconnected nodes within a digitally mediated production network. Inspired by multi-sited approaches that follow circulation rather than bounded communities, the study combines on-site observation (Tulungagung, Probolinggo, Makassar, Ambon, and East Kalimantan) with digital ethnography across YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram between 2021 and 2023. This design allows the tracing of rhythmic templates, production practices, and circulation metrics across geographically distant but digitally connected sites. In this sense, the research extends multi-sited ethnography into the domain of platform-mediated cultural production, where "the field" is simultaneously physical and algorithmic.

Theoretically, the findings refine several key frameworks. The concept of "dominant emergent" associated with Raymond Williams is expanded to explain not only the emergence of a dominant form, but also its infrastructural stabilization through digital tools and algorithmic visibility. Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity is specified at the sonic-structural level, showing how negotiation occurs not abstractly in a "third space," but concretely within rhythmic templates and arrangement decisions. Meanwhile, media ecology perspectives are extended by demonstrating that technological infrastructure does not merely mediate cultural expression but codifies aesthetic parameters that shape what

becomes reproducible and scalable. Together, these refinements suggest that cultural centralization in the digital era operates less through institutional dominance and more through infrastructural convergence.

This research is not without limitations. The study focuses on the 2014-2024 period and primarily examines studio-based production practices; live off-platform performance circuits were not systematically analyzed. While the multi-sited approach covered five regions, it does not claim to represent all Indonesian musical ecologies. Digital ethnography also presents constraints: platform analytics are partially opaque, algorithmic processes cannot be fully accessed, and view counts do not necessarily reflect listening depth or audience interpretation.

Further studies on the digital music economy—such as monetization structures, copyright flows, and revenue distribution across regional studios—would deepen understanding of how aesthetic centralization intersects with economic incentives. Comparative research across Southeast Asia may also reveal whether similar rhythmic lingua franca phenomena emerge in other digitally networked popular music scenes. By extending inquiry into algorithmic governance and digital market structures, future scholarship can further clarify how infrastructural decentralization continues to coexist with aesthetic convergence in the evolving Indonesian music landscape.

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