

Ethno-psychology of *ambyar*: The representation of relative deprivation and emotional coping in Javanese pop song lyrics

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Received: May 04, 2026

Revised: August 15, 2026

Accepted: August 19, 2026

KEYWORDS

Emotional Coping
Indigenous
Psychology
Javanese Pop
Mental Health
Relative
Deprivation

ABSTRACT

This study examines how psychological experience is represented in contemporary Javanese pop song lyrics amid socio-economic inequality. The phenomenon of "*ambyar*" is read here not merely as an expression of romantic loss, but as reconstructed in these lyrics as an emotional response to social inequality. This study analyzes the representation of relative deprivation, self-esteem threat, and culturally embedded emotional coping in the Javanese pop songs *Ropang*, *Yowis*, *Titenono*, and *Ginio*. Qualitative content analysis based on indigenous psychology will be used in this paper to analyze the representation of relative deprivation, self-esteem threat, and culturally rooted emotion-coping. The findings show that the representation of emotional experience takes place using social comparison, internalized economic identity, and culturally rooted coping strategy such as *sambat* and *nrimo* coping strategy as well as assertive way of response. All findings are treated as textual representations rather than as evidence of the actual psychological states of songwriters, performers, or audiences. This study proposes the Ethno-Psychology of *Ambyar* as an interpretive framework, inductively developed from these four songs, for understanding the construction of psychological experience in Javanese pop music; its generalizability and empirical validity remain open to further testing.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, Javanese popular music, in the form of dangdut koplo and modern campursari, has experienced a significant discursive shift. While the earlier forms of popular music in Indonesia were based on the aesthetics of music and the emotional expressions of the individual (Hadi et al., 2025), the latest developments in popular music in Indonesia reflect a move towards the articulation of more complex social experiences. Thus, the lyrics of the songs in Javanese popular music have moved beyond the medium of romantic expression and have emerged as a representation of the psychological vulnerability linked to economic and social conditions.

The phenomenon of "*ambyar*" represents a significant manifestation of the shift in the discursive practice in Javanese popular music. While "*ambyar*" was initially associated with heartbreak and emotional expressions, the concept has evolved to become a form of emotional expression linked to the collective experience in the face of life challenges. Thus, Javanese popular music has emerged as a symbolic medium for the articulation of emotional and social expressions, as linked to the concept of music, affect, and the

digital communities such as *Sobat Ambyar* (Qorib & Dewi, 2021). Dangdut has emerged as a medium for articulating social expressions and has been linked to cultural diplomacy (Akmal et al., 2022), while the genre has also been stigmatized as a representation of "low taste" in the context of academic discourses (Samuel et al., 2024).

Prior to the psychological conceptualization of "*ambyar*", the cultural evolution of this term in relation to popular Javanese music needs to be explored more deeply. The term arose in the context of campursari and dangdut koplo music genre by the artist Didi Kempot, where the group of his fans formed a *Sobat Ambyar* community — an online community based on shared feelings of grief, collective experience of solidarity and not only individual breakups (Qorib & Dewi, 2021). With further development of the community and its songs, ambyar became an expression of suffering and vulnerability expressed in a collective manner through songs and not just the breakup anymore. It is through this cultural background that this paper proposes to expand the concept of ambyar into a psychological perspective.

Other than ambyar, previous literature on dangdut and Javanese pop music includes the construction of masculine identities in dangdut classical songs (Hartono & Ulya, 2025); the objectification of female bodies in dangdut visual and lyrical imagery (Lahdji, 2013; Wahdiyati & Dhaifina, 2022; Winduwati, 2017); and the utilization of Javanese pop music by male singers to express emotions (Chyndy et al., 2025). All of these previous works support the presence of various valences and emotions in the musical genre, although without linking them to any particular psychological construct.

In the Javanese cultural context, the psychological experience cannot be understood separately from the value system in which the concept of inner harmony (*tentrem*), as well as the cultural practices of *sambat* and *nrimo* in dealing with life pressures, is significant (Khamida et al., 2021; Pamarto et al., 2025; Ratnawati & Hastangka, 2022; Subandi, 2013). The value system is significant in the construction of individual and group resilience in dealing with life pressures (Munawaroh et al., 2024; Zafila & Purnairawan, 2024). The psychological experience is seen as a cognitive construct in which the indigenous perspective is significant (Berry & Kim, 1993; Kresna, 2023; Rochman & Faishol, 2024; Safaria, 2026).

In this study, *sambat* and *nrimo* are positioned specifically as culturally embedded coping and emotion-regulation practices in the sense of Lazarus & Folkman (1984) rather than as instances of Freudian ego defense. This distinction is maintained throughout the analysis: only responses that show clear textual evidence of redirecting or disguising affect toward another party are treated as candidates for the narrower category of ego defense.

However, most of these studies are seen to be focused on cultural values or symbolic representation without specifically relating these to the psychological structure affected by socio-economic inequalities. This is different in relative deprivation theory, which explains emotional distress as not being specifically related to absolute poverty but to social comparison with those in more favorable socio-economic circumstances (Festinger, 1954; Gurr, 2016; Walker & Smith, 2002). Such circumstances may cause threats to self-esteem and can trigger various psychological processes, including the development of ego defense mechanisms as a means to maintain emotional stability (Freud, 2018).

Thus, there is a particular research gap in terms of the integration of relative deprivation theory, self-esteem threat, ego defense mechanisms, and indigenous psychology in the analysis of popular cultural texts. Most studies on Javanese songs are seen to be limited to semiotic or linguistic analysis without exploring particular psychological aspects (Nazarrina et al., 2025). Thus, there is a particular research gap in terms of how psychological experiences related to social inequalities are not only represented but are also interpreted and negotiated within contemporary Javanese pop music.

This connection can be stated in theoretical terms. In accordance with sociometer theory (Leary, 2012) relative deprivation impacts on self-esteem since the process of social comparison serves as a continuous measure of one's status and acceptance in the group, and therefore a growing gap between one's own situation and the situation of the referent group is perceived as a threat to one's self-respect directly, not as an economic reality alone. Further, according to the transactional stress and coping theory of Lazarus & Folkman (1984) the threat to self-esteem is assessed and regulated by any available emotion-regulation tools of culture for the individual — namely, *sambat* and *nrimo* in the Javanese case.

Based on this premise, this study conceives of relative deprivation as an affective trigger, self-esteem threat as an evaluative mechanism, and ego defense mechanisms as psychological responses facilitated by indigenous value systems. This study seeks to examine the representation of the three dimensions in the lyrics of *Ropang*, *Yowis*, *Titenono*, and *Ginio* songs qualitatively.

Based on the theoretical foundation outlined above, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is relative deprivation represented in the lyrics of contemporary Javanese pop songs? (2) How is self-esteem threat represented in these lyrics as a consequence of relative deprivation? (3) How are culturally embedded coping strategies represented as textual responses to this self-esteem threat? Taken together, answers to these three questions inform the broader aim of this study: to propose the

Ethno-Psychology of *Ambyar* as an interpretive framework for understanding the representation of psychological experience in Javanese popular music.

Theoretically, this study conceives of the framework of Ethno-psychology of Ambyar as a model for interpreting the representation and negotiation of psychological experiences in the context of social inequality, facilitated by popular culture as a medium. In this way, this study contributes not only to the study of popular music but also to the development of indigenous psychology in its examination of the relationship between culture and emotion in the context of social inequality. At this stage, Ethno-psychology of Ambyar is put forward as an interpretive framework developed inductively from the analysis of these four songs, not as a generalized theoretical model; its broader applicability across a wider corpus of Javanese popular music remains a question for subsequent research.

Method

The research design is based on a qualitative approach to indigenous psychology. The research aims to analyze the representation of psychological experiences through popular cultural texts. The research object is the content of Javanese pop song lyrics, including *Ropang* (2025) by Denny Caknan, *Ginio* (2023) by Gilga Sahid, *Yowis* (2022) by Hendra Kumbara, and *Titenono* (2024) by Hendra Kumbara. This research is based on purposive sampling with three main sampling criteria: (1) the existence of references to economic situations, (2) affective expressions related to self-esteem, and (3) expressions related to psychological reactions to the situations.

The songs were selected using two stages of purposeful sampling. In the exploratory stage, the researchers analyzed a wide range of modern Javanese pop and dangdut koplo songs such as *Ego Wong Tuo*, *Adoh*, and *Pelampiasan* among others. The songs were dropped because they failed to meet all the three criteria stated above – in some of them the singer expressed emotional vulnerability but not economic or comparative, while in others there was economic adversity without any affective emotion concerning self-respect. *Ropang*, *Yowis*, *Titenono*, and *Ginio* were chosen because they were able to meet all the three criteria together. It is also notable that the four songs have come from different singers published in the years 2022 to 2025.

The research object is the content of pop song lyrics related to lyrical sentences or words that include semantic indicators related to relative deprivation and culturally embedded emotional coping. The research analysis is based on Qualitative Content Analysis with a mixed deductive-inductive approach. At the initial stage, coding was guided by the operational definitions summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definitions Used in Coding

Category	Sub-category	Operational Definition
Relative Deprivation	Social comparison	The lyric positions the subject's condition relative to a more advantaged other, whether stated directly or implied through action or aspiration
	Economic injustice	The lyric attributes unequal treatment or hardship to economic condition
	Status symbol	The lyric uses a recognizable social-status marker as a point of comparison
Self-Esteem Threat	Negative self-labeling	The subject applies a socially devalued label to themselves
	Emotional disintegration	The lyric expresses affective breakdown using explicit distress vocabulary
	Reflective self-evaluation	The lyric poses a self-directed question interrogating one's own worth or adequacy
Emotional Coping	<i>Sambat</i> (emotion-focused)	The lyric externalizes affect through complaint or lament without directing it at a target for corrective action
	<i>Nrimo</i>	The lyric frames the stressor in terms of acceptance, distinct from passive resignation or simple gratitude
	Confrontative coping	The lyric directs an assertive or warning statement outward toward a named or implied other

Projection would be considered as such only in a very strict and classic sense if a lyric contains a projective process where an internal but rejected emotion or drive is projected to another without any textual support showing that the other party had indeed committed an act corresponding to that process. This criterion was used strictly as the implications of its use to the coding of *Titenono* and *Ginio* would be described in the Results and Discussion section.

Next, these codes were then classified into more generic categories such as self-esteem threats and culturally rooted coping mechanisms. These were done through the process of identifying the general

representations shown in the codes found in the text. Lastly, the interpretation of the results based on indigenous psychology among the Javanese and relative deprivation theory would be made. In this case, the results should not be considered as reflections of social realities but only of their representations in the text.

The coding and interpretation of results were done collaboratively by the authors of this paper. It is the primary responsibility of the first author to conduct data analysis, whereas the rest of the authors are validators for the accuracy of linguistic, literary, cultural, and pedagogical content. Different interpretations of the data were compared among the authors until an agreement was reached. This kind of discussion was used as an audit trail and as a method for theoretical triangulation of the research.

Since *sambat*, *nrimo*, and *titenono* have meanings which cannot be explained through translation, the interpretation of these terms was done through the validation of the research team, including one member who specializes in Javanese culture. This member of the research team has acted both as the cultural and linguistic validator in this study.

The rigor of the analysis was ensured through the use of the above-mentioned strategies such as theoretical triangulation, audit trail, and reflexivity to confine the interpretation within the limits of the text. With the help of this strategy, this research endeavors to contribute to the conceptualization of the ethno-psychology of Ambyar as a theory of the constructed nature of psychology in modern Javanese pop music.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of contemporary Javanese pop song lyrics has shown that there is an evident pattern in the construction of psychological experience through the relationship between economic conditions, self-esteem, and emotions. The results, based on the coding and categorization process, can be structured along three main dimensions. The first is the representation of relative deprivation, the second is self-esteem threat, and the third is culturally embedded ego defense mechanisms.

Representation of Relative Deprivation

Relative deprivation is an experience of dissatisfaction based on comparisons between one's own condition and that of more advantaged reference groups, as opposed to absolute poverty. In this respect, Festinger (1954) argues that social comparison is an essential component of human behavior, as individuals seek to evaluate their social status. Furthermore, Gurr (2016) as well as Walker & Smith (2002) note that relative deprivation is based on the gap between value expectations and value capabilities, often leading to affective pressures such as feelings of frustration, injustice, and self-worth.

In song lyrics, relative deprivation is not presented as an objective experience but as an interpretation of meaning through social interactions (Cheung & Feng, 2021; Difadrana & Mulyana, 2026). In this respect, relative deprivation is presented as an experience of subjective social comparison, as it is realized through an explicit comparison, economic injustice, and social status (Pak, 2025; Tobar, 2022). Representation of relative deprivation can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Representation of Relative Deprivation in Javanese Pop Song Lyrics

<i>Song</i>	<i>Lyrics</i>	<i>Form of Representation</i>	<i>Description</i>
Ropang	"Damel ngimbangi liyane, sing ketok penak uripe" (DR-01)	Implicit social comparison	The subject compares themselves to more advantaged groups through attempts to "keep up"
Yowis	"Apa merga wong ora nduwe..." (DR-02)	Expression of economic injustice	Economic condition is positioned as the basis for unequal social treatment
Titenono	"Wis dadi bojo pegawai negeri" (DR-03)	Symbol of social status	Occupational status serves as a marker of hierarchy and a reference point for comparison
Ginio	"Aku mbok bandingke karo wong sing sugih kae" (DR-04)	Explicit social comparison	The subject is directly compared with a wealthier individual

The four songs show some level of consistency in their portrayal of relative deprivation, especially in terms of the mechanism of upward social comparison. According to social psychology, upward social comparison plays a role in the increase of one's dissatisfaction and emotional disturbance when comparing oneself with the individual who is considered more privileged (Tian et al., 2025; Xu & Li, 2024). For instance, in *Ropang*, "*ngimbangi liyane*" does not only mean an effort to catch up with others, but it also indicates an

unreachable gap in comparison. In this case, social comparison is no longer confined to a cognitive exercise but is rather an affective experience associated with psychological exhaustion.

In *Yowis*, social comparison is also not directly stated, as the social comparison process is conducted through economic injustice expressed using the term "*wong ora nduwe*." This phenomenon indicates that the economic standing of individuals serves as the basis for how people perceive others and their treatment. This discovery aligns with empirical evidence that economic disparity influences both material well-being and social acceptance and self-esteem (Elbæk et al., 2023). Hence, the social comparison performed in this song operates indirectly through the cause-and-effect relationship between economic condition and social acceptance.

On the other hand, in *Titenono*, social comparison is conducted through social status symbols represented by the expression "*pegawai negeri*" (civil servant). In Javanese society, civil servants hold a high status, serving as indicators of social hierarchy and self-respect in collectivist societies. The aforementioned claim is validated by findings in the field of cultural psychology, where it was demonstrated that status symbols are crucial in collectivist cultures due to their ability to act as self-referential hierarchies of comparison (Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024; Yu & Blader, 2020). Hence, these symbols serve as a point of reference in hierarchical structures that support social comparison.

Unlike in the other three songs, *Ginio* uses the notion of social comparison in its most concrete manifestation through "*aku mbok bandingke karo wong sing sugih kae*." In this case, social comparison is explicitly mentioned in the lyrics, meaning that it is not just symbolized through certain things. It can be assumed that the feeling of relative deprivation does not occur as a result of abstract social structures but is supported by concrete interpersonal relations. This observation supports evidence that relative deprivation frequently manifests itself in interpersonal communication, especially when people tend to compare themselves with other people who they believe to be above them socially (Pak, 2025; Xu & Li, 2024).

Overall, the collection of songs does not present poverty as an objective reality but as an affective state resulting from social comparisons among individuals. Social comparison is the main mechanism through which poverty can be understood and expressed in different ways ranging from status symbols to the expression of economic injustice and direct comparisons. This underscores the understanding that relative deprivation is not a single entity but a multidimensional concept combining cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions (Kuo et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2024).

First, these findings reinforce the idea that social comparison theory put forward by Festinger (1954) in which social comparison plays a vital role in self-assessment holds true (Liu & Xiao, 2024). In other words, song lyrics in the given example serve as the representational means for constructing and articulating social comparison process as illustrated in the studies focusing on the use of music as a means of social experience (Ayyildiz et al., 2025; Pring et al., 2024). Second, relative deprivation theory formulated by Gurr (2016) and Walker & Smith (2002) proves to be relevant in explaining the nature of poverty as a subjective and comparative phenomenon.

This research further contributes to the literature in illustrating that social comparison in Javanese pop music transcends its role as a structural phenomenon and is accomplished through various representational modes. This study adds to the growing body of research that tends to emphasize social comparison in structural and digital domains by showing that media culture, too, is a means through which inequality experiences can be formed (Ayyildiz et al., 2025; Pring et al., 2024). The current study reinforces previous findings that indicate the relational and subjective nature of inequality, where inequality is seen not as a condition but rather as a process whereby people compare themselves to others within social interactions (Elbæk et al., 2023). Relative deprivation in song lyrics, therefore, is a complex concept that encompasses both cognitive and affective processes, as well as culture and language.

Representation of Self-Esteem Threat

Self-esteem threat is the state where people perceive a decrease in self-worth as a result of inconsistencies between standards and actual status in social relationships. Following the classical model, Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as an evaluation of self-worth on a universal scale resulting from social interaction. The concept of self-esteem is further elaborated by Leary (2012) who presents sociometer theory, according to which self-esteem is regarded as a marker of social inclusion. Hence, when people feel that they do not live up to expectations or are rejected, they inevitably encounter self-esteem threat, leading to affective reactions like inferiority complex, shame, and disappointment (Gerber & Wheeler, 2009; Wesselmann et al., 2023).

In the case of lyrics analysis, self-esteem threat cannot be viewed as a psychological phenomenon; instead, it is represented as an interpretation of meaning through linguistic and interpersonal interactions (Ayyildiz et al., 2025; Pring et al., 2024). Therefore, self-esteem threat in this research can be considered a

negative self-assessment reflected in various representations, such as negative self-labeling, inferiority complex, and emotional fragmentation can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Representation of Self-Esteem Threat in Javanese Pop Song Lyrics

<i>Song</i>	<i>Lyrics</i>	<i>Form of Representation</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Ropang</i>	"Kenapa wong kere slalu dicampakkan" (SE-01)	Negative self-labeling	Economic identity is associated with social unworthiness
<i>Yowis</i>	"Mental health hatiku ajur" (SE-02)	Emotional disintegration	Expression of emotional breakdown due to social pressure
<i>Titenono</i>	"Atiku wes ajur mumur" (SE-03)	Emotional disintegration	Affective condition indicating intense emotional damage
<i>Ginio</i>	"Kurangku opo... opo pengorbananku iseh kurang" (SE-04)	Reflective self-evaluation	The subject questions their self-worth in interpersonal relations

These four songs highlight how self-esteem threat is generated in the course of self-evaluations arising from socio-economic pressures. In particular, in *Ropang*, the usage of the phrase "wong kere" not only acts as a material indicator but also as self-labeling associated with social unacceptability. As a result, the economic identity of the subject is now perceived internally, as opposed to being viewed externally.

In addition, phrases such as "mental health hatiku ajur" (*Ropang*) and "ajur mumur" (*Yowis*) exemplify how self-esteem threat progresses to emotional fragmentation. Importantly, the term "mental health," combined with the locally used "ajur," constitutes discursive hybridity, where the modern psychological vocabulary is utilized for representing affective states that are rooted in culture. Such hybridity has been similarly demonstrated for the use of linguistically hybrid terms in the discourse on emotional states in popular culture (Nazri & Kassim, 2023). Therefore, emotional states are not only dependent on societal factors but also are constructed by language.

Self-esteem threat in *Ginio*, on the other hand, takes on the dimension of reflexivity through statements like "kurangku opo" and "opo pengorbananku iseh kurang." While labeling is often regarded as a static construction, these statements suggest that there is actually a process by which individuals question their sense of self-worth within interpersonal interactions. Hence, in addition to being a result of social pressures, self-esteem threat also becomes a dynamic construct.

It could be argued that these findings support two aspects of the self-esteem literature, specifically that self-esteem is a social construction Rosenberg (1965), as well as its role as a measure of social acceptance according to sociometer theory (Leary, 2012). That is, self-esteem threat is not just a personal issue but a social issue as it arises out of social evaluations made via interactions and language (Zhao & Peng, 2021).

Conversely, this research also makes another significant contribution by showing that, while self-esteem threat does not necessarily result in the internalization of stigma, it can be transformed into reflexive actions that facilitate the negotiation of one's identity. This finding is consistent with prior studies that have focused primarily on the detrimental effects of self-esteem threat as an internalization process where people embrace negative stereotypes from society within their identity, thereby lowering their self-worth (Burwell & Bias, 2024). Hence, the state of low self-esteem conveyed through lyrics is not limited; rather, it is a continuum ranging from internalization to reflexivity.

Representation of Culturally Embedded Emotional Coping

Responses to affective pressure in these lyrics are understood here as culturally embedded coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) rather than as instances of classical psychoanalytic ego defense (Freud, 2018; Freud, 1936). This study distinguishes two coping orientations evident in the data: emotion-focused coping, oriented toward managing the emotional impact of a stressor, represented here by *sambat* and *nrimo*; and confrontative coping, oriented toward directly addressing or asserting against the source of the stressor, represented here by *titenono*-type assertion. A response is classified as confrontative when the lyric directs an assertive or warning statement outward toward a named or implied other; as *sambat* when it externalizes affect through complaint or lament without directing it at a target for corrective action; and as *nrimo* when it frames the stressor in terms of acceptance can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Representation of Emotional Coping in Javanese Pop Song Lyrics

<i>Song</i>	<i>Lyrics</i>	<i>Form of Representation</i>	<i>Description</i>
Ropang	"Ngempet dadi tangisan" (DM-01)	<i>Sambat (expressive)</i>	Suppressed emotion released through verbal, expressive articulation
Yowis	"Tetep kudu bersyukur..." (DM-02)	<i>Nrimo</i>	Acceptance under continued pressure, distinct from simple gratitude
Titenono	"Titenono awakmu..." (DM-03)	<i>Confrontative coping</i>	Assertive, forward-directed statement toward another party, reclaiming a sense of control
Ginio	"Wes cukup aku mbok apusi..." (DM-04)	<i>Sambat (confrontative)</i>	Repeated complaint paired with a direct, named grievance

The four songs show variation along this coping continuum rather than uniform use of a single strategy. In *Ropang*, "*ngempet dadi tangisan*" represents *sambat* as an expressive release of previously suppressed emotion, consistent with research on the role of emotional expression in psychological regulation (Brown et al., 2022). In *Yowis*, "*tetep kudu bersyukur*" represents *nrimo*. This phrasing should not be read as equivalent to a general disposition of gratitude: within Javanese indigenous psychology, *nrimo* denotes a specific ethical orientation of accepting one's circumstances as a way of maintaining inner composure and social harmony, distinct from either passive resignation or simple thankfulness (Ratnawati & Hastangka, 2022; Rochman & Faishol, 2024). The lyric's juxtaposition of "*tetep kudu*" with "*bersyukur*" signals this specific orientation rather than an unqualified positive emotion, and is consistent with cross-cultural findings that emotion-regulation strategies are shaped by local cultural values (He et al., 2021).

In *Titenono*, "*titenono awakmu*" represents confrontative coping: rather than suppressing or accepting the affective pressure, the subject issues an assertive, future-oriented statement directed at another party. This can be read as an attempt to reclaim a sense of control within the limits of textual representation, without requiring an intrapsychic displacement mechanism to explain it.

In *Ginio*, the coding shows a comparable pattern of confrontative *sambat*: the repetition of complaint ("*wes cukup*") is paired with a direct, named grievance ("*aku mbok apusi*") rather than an unresolved, displaced conflict, suggesting a more assertive variant of emotional articulation than the release represented in *Ropang*.

Read together, these findings partially depart from classical psychoanalytic accounts of defense (Freud, 2018), which frame such responses as unconscious, intrapsychic operations. Instead, and consistent with modern coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the findings suggest that responses to affective pressure in these lyrics are better understood as socially and culturally situated coping strategies — *sambat* and *nrimo* as emotion-focused strategies, and *titenono*-type assertion as a confrontative strategy — that vary along a continuum from suppression and expression to acceptance and direct assertion (Giuseppe et al., 2021), rather than as fixed, intrapsychic defense mechanisms.

Deprivation, Self-Esteem, and Coping in the "Ethno-Psychology of Ambyar"

Considering the three analytical components identified above, it is clear that psychological experience expressed through Javanese pop song lyrics does not occur independently but exists as part of an interrelated network of relations. In this context, relative deprivation can no longer be viewed as the beginning stage but as an emotion generator through social comparison processes. As such, "*ambyar*" cannot be taken to mean the natural expression of emotion, but the construction of its meaning within socio-economic context and self-evaluation. This means that the conclusions drawn from the analysis are supportive of the psychological impacts of social inequality as highlighted in relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 2016).

In addition, the occurrence of cultural coping mechanisms like *sambat* and *nrimo* means that the regulation of emotion in the Javanese culture goes beyond the mere alleviation of psychological suffering but rather involves maintaining harmony within the social and symbolic interactions between individuals (He et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2025). As such, psychological experiences portrayed in song lyrics should be considered not only at an individual level but also at a collective one.

The study findings further suggest differences in the ways in which these processes are enacted. While most responses involve the process of stabilization via acceptance, some representations seem to favor emotional expression without involving any mechanism of solving the problem that triggers the emotion. This means that responses to social pressure are not always linear but take place along a range where emotional expression and stabilization occur (Hollenstein & Faulkner, 2024).

In such circumstances, the psychological experience of Javanese pop music is more than simply the result of social dynamics; it actually helps to form the way people think about themselves in society. From

this point of view, it can be seen that music is not only a means of expressing oneself, but also a way of representing social realities.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the corpus is limited to four purposively sampled songs; purposive sampling in qualitative research is intended to produce an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon rather than statistical generalization to a wider population (Andriani et al., 2025), and the resulting Ethno-Psychology of *Ambyar* framework should accordingly be read as an interpretive model developed inductively from this corpus rather than as a claim about Javanese popular music as a whole. Second, because the data consist solely of song lyrics, the findings describe how psychological experience is textually represented rather than how it is actually felt, produced, or received by songwriters, performers, or listeners; reception studies applying Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding framework to Indonesian popular-culture audiences show that listeners actively negotiate, and at times resist, the meanings encoded in a text depending on factors such as age, gender, education, and personal experience (Tunshorin, 2016), so claims about audience psychology remain outside the scope of what this study's textual method can support. Third, although this study's interpretive process was strengthened through collaborative coding and cross-validation among authors with complementary linguistic, literary, and cultural expertise, interpretive qualitative analysis retains an element of researcher subjectivity that triangulation can reduce but not entirely eliminate (Bachri, 2010).

These limitations point toward several directions for further research. Future studies could extend the Ethno-Psychology of *Ambyar* framework to a larger and more diverse corpus of Javanese popular music, spanning a wider range of artists, sub-genres, and release periods, guided by a more systematically documented sampling strategy to test the framework's applicability beyond the four songs analyzed here (Andriani et al., 2025). Complementing textual analysis with empirical, audience-centered methods — such as reception interviews or surveys administered to listeners, including members of fan communities such as Sobat Ambyar — would allow the textual representations identified here to be tested against how audiences actually decode and negotiate meaning from these lyrics (Tunshorin, 2016), while continued attention to triangulation and audit-trail documentation would further strengthen the credibility of future interpretive analyses in this area (Bachri, 2010). Finally, comparative research examining whether a similar relative deprivation-self-esteem-coping sequence appears in the popular music of other Indonesian regional cultures would help clarify whether the pattern identified here reflects a culturally specific phenomenon or a broader dynamic expressed through culturally particular forms.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that the songs *Ropang*, *Yowis*, *Titenono*, and *Ginio* represent psychological experience as an interrelated sequence of relative deprivation, self-esteem threat, and culturally embedded emotional coping. Relative deprivation, represented through social comparison, is followed by an affective tension that is textually constructed as internalized negative self-assessment. This does not end at the level of perception: the lyrics further represent this tension as managed through culturally shaped coping strategies — the emotion-focused practices of *sambat* and *nrimo*, and a more confrontative, assertive mode of response. Read this way, “ambyar” is represented not only as emotional fragmentation but also as the construction of self-meaning amid social comparison.

This paper proposes the Ethno-Psychology of Ambyar as an interpretive framework for reading how representations of psychological experience shaped by social hierarchy are articulated within Javanese popular culture. At this stage, the framework is put forward as inductively developed from the analysis of these four songs rather than as a generalized theoretical model, and its findings remain textual representations rather than descriptions of the actual psychological states of listeners or songwriters. Extending and testing this framework — including its applicability to a broader corpus of Javanese popular music and, eventually, empirical verification beyond textual analysis — remains a task for future research.

Declarations

- Author contribution** : Chafit Ulya was responsible for the entire research project. He also led the writing of the manuscript and collaborated with the others author. All of authors participated in the data collection, transcription, and analysis. They also revised the manuscript and approved the final manuscript.
- Funding statement** : This research is funded by through the Institute of Research and Community Service (LPPM) with contract no. 462/UN27.22/PT.01.03/2026).

- Conflict of interest** : The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
- Ethics Approval** : Information on Ethics Approval and informed consent statements are required for all articles published in BAHASTRA since 2025.
- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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