DECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND MORAL DECADENCE IN SUNDANESE SOCIETY: A CULTURAL READING OF DOEL SUMBANG'SONG 'EMA'

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Abstract

The study explores moral decadence and cultural identity dislocation in Sundanese society through a textual analysis of Doel Sumbang's popular song 'Ema' (an acronym for Edana Manusa). Amidst the currents of modernization and the penetration of contemporary urban subcultures, the song serves as a sociological document recording massive values shifts. Employing a cultural analysis method, this study focuses on three crucial issues: first, the identity deconstruction from the ideal Sundanese philosophical framework (cageur) toward the loss of sanity (edan) due to urban hedonism exposure, second the commodification of the body and the collapse of personal dignity to fund instantaneous gratification, and third the profanization of intergenerational relations that inflicts emotional trauma on parents (indung bapa). The findings indicate that 'Ema' exceeds a mere personal satire, operating instead as an urgent cultural critique of structural crisis and the erosion of individual moral agency within the contemporary public sphere.

Keywords: Identity deconstruction, Moral decadence, Sundanese society, Doel Sumbang, Urban hedonism.

INTRODUCTION

Doel Sumbang's song 'Ema' can be read as a record of a Sundanese cultural crisis, one marked by identity dislocation produced by the collision between inherited local values and the growing penetration of urban, consumerist, and hedonistic subcultures (Hall & Jefferson, 1993; Simmel, 2004; Yuliantari et al., 2025). This reading fits research showing that songs are not only entertainment but social texts through which communities register value conflict, cultural anxiety, and shifting identity under globalization and digital capitalism (S. Cohen, 2011; Perdana, 2025). Unfiltered modernization does not simply introduce new lifestyle, it also weakens older moral framework by displacing communal orientations with consumption, symbolic status, and external models of selfhood (S. Cohen, 2011; Durkheim, 1982). In the Sundanese case, that erosion is especially consequential because cageur and bener belong to a broader pancawaluya ethics in which well-being is collective, spiritual, and relational rather than individual (Kartika & Agustina, 2026; Maffesoli, 1996). When that philosophical orientation is hollowed out, the pursuit of pleasure can slide into destructive substance dependence and

distorted forms of urban belonging rather than genuine flourishing (A. K. Cohen, 1955). Distress urban communities in peri-urban Indonesia can gain material relief while simultaneously experiencing deterioration in affiliation related stress, and youth migration elsewhere similarly weakens language, ritual continuity, and communal identity (Bourdieu, 1977; Nurdinawati et al., 2026). Instead of guaranteeing upward mobility, migration under precarious conditions can trap people in new vulnerabilities shaped by poverty, weak inclusion, long work hours, and unstable urban social worlds (Foucault, 1977; Nurdinawati et al., 2026).

The abuse of illicit substances by the subject in the song 'Ema' triggers family disintegration and, in turn, contributes to the weakening of the communal solidarity that has long sustained Sundanese social life (Durkheim, 1997; Evnawati, 2025; Merton, 1968). This behavior is not only self-destructive at the individual level, it also damages the household as the smallest unit of social protection by weakening the family's educational, supervisory, and affective functions (McCoy et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 1998). As caregiving bonds are disrupted, the heaviest emotional consequences are borne by indung bapa in the hometown, who must absorb psychological strain, reduced prosocial reciprocity, and the longer-term risk of intergenerational distress (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fu et al., 2026). In this reading, substance abuse signifies not only personal ruin but also the erosion of affection, guidance, and mutual responsibility that structure Sundanese kinship and moral life (Kiranti et al., 2025; Polanyi, 2001). The result is a direct weakening of the ethics of social devotion and togetherness, expressed in silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh, that underwrite the collective moral resilience of Sundanese society amid urban dislocation, cultural fragmentation, and modernization (Maffesoli, 1996; Widyanti & Syah, 2025).

An acute spiritual crisis is manifested in the erosion of moral consciousness when life orientation is displaced from transcendence, responsibility, and ethical self-restraint toward the pursuit of false pleasure, hedonism, and instant gratification (Kierkegaard, 1980a; Zaprulkhan et al., 2025). This shift is tied to the hegemony of materialistic values, the marginalization of spiritual dimensions, and the weakening of individual spiritual control, so that pleasure becomes a guiding principle even when it violates religious and social norms. Pragmatic acts that sacrifice personal honor and human dignity for the consumption of illicit or degrading goods signal the collapse of the boundary between the

sacred and the profane, as ethical life is subordinated to material desire and bodily gratification (Eliade, 1957; Watts & Houtman, 2022). Such behavior indicates a condition of inner alienation in which human beings become estranged from conscience, higher meaning, and their own moral essence. Studies across religion, philosophy, and cultural sociology describe this condition as spiritual emptiness, loss of meaning, and the replacement of divine or universal values by illusory physical satisfaction, consumerist desire, and secular idolatry. When this profanization becomes normalized, it fractures integrity and drives the subject into spiritual decadence that impoverishes the very substance of human life and humanity itself (Marcel, 2008; Zaprulkhan et al., 2025).

Doel Sumbang's song 'Ema' deconstructs the cultural dislocation, familial disintegration, and spiritual crisis of Sundanese society by showing how the collision between inherited ethical values such as cageur and bener and the expanding penetration of urban hedonistic subcultures produces a crisis of identity, morality, and belonging (Hall & Jefferson, 1993). The song should be read as a sociological archive that records the trauma of Sundanese identity deformation amid globalization, digital mediation, and unfiltered modernization. This reading showing that popular music can serves as social critique and a medium for preserving or contesting cultural identity under conditions of crisis (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002). Within that framework, the narrative of 'Ema' demands a critical interpretation of metropolitan space as a site that often fails to deliver the promise of upward mobility and instead generates social dislocation, weakened communal bonds, and market-dependent forms of life that erode rural solidarity. In this sense, the subject's addiction to illicit substances is a sign that moral decadence at the individual level resound with the erosion of the collective ethical foundations that once sustained Sundanese communal life. Deconstructing the 'Ema' phenomenon is essential for tracing the structural clash between the preservation of local cultural roots and the wider forces of commodification, homogenization, and global cultural pressure now encroaching on the lived world of contemporary Sundanese society.

This study aims to comprehensively deconstructs the cultural dislocation, familial disintegration, and spiritual crisis of Sundanese society as implicitly recorded in the narrative of Doel Sumbang's song 'Ema'. Through a sociological and cultural reading, the study seeks to map the interaction between the erosion of traditional Sundanese values and the penetration of urban hedonistic subcultures that reshape identity, weaken

communal bonds, and compromise human dignity. This problem emerges within broader processes of urbanization, globalization, and digitalization that alter value orientations, consumption patterns, and forms of belonging while placing local culture sustained pressure. This exploration is intended to provide a sharper theoretical framework for understanding the clash between modernity and the resilience of local identity because Sundanese society has responded to change through adaptation, ethical balance, and cultural synthesis. To establish that analytical foundation, the nest section will examine literature on the sociology of culture, urban identity dislocation, and Sundanese moral ethics, since these domains together explain how cultural degradation and spiritual ambiguity become intertwined under unfiltered modernization.

Literature Review

Popular Music as Socio-Cultural Critique

Popular music and localized artistic forms are neutral entertainment, it serves as social texts through which communities register structural anxiety, value conflict, and shifting identities under capitalism, crisis, and late modernity (Adorno, 1976; Bagaskara & Audhyati, 2025). In youth and popular culture, music does not only mirror social conditions but also helps people think through injustice, crisis, and claim for social change (S. Cohen, 2011; Guerra et al., 2020). Poplar songs can be read as acoustic archives that preserve the frictions of modernization by recording how local symbols, lived experience, and collective memory encounter globalization, digital mediation, and consumer pressure (Benjamin, 2008; Guerra et al., 2020).

This is relevance because modernization introduce new lifestyles and reshapes values orientations, community ties, and cultural identity by intensifying individualism, materialism, and weakened social cohesion. Studies in cultural sociology treat modernization and market expansion as processes that transform meaning, morality, trust, community, and resistance (Habermas, 1984). From this perspective, ‘Ema’ can be read as a song and as a cultural document that registers how communities negotiate modernity through aesthetic expression. Anthropological study shows that music is also a site where local actors assert identity, resist homogenization, and mediate the tension between preservation and innovation. This approach guides the reading of ‘Ema’ as a symptomatic

response to socio-cultural change, where urban pressure, commodification, and external models of selfhood unsettle communal moral worlds (Harvey, 1989).

Alienation and Cultural identity Crisis

Transition from rural agrarian settings to metropolitan space is understood as a socio-spatial process marked by structural friction instead of a smooth path of progress(Harvey, 1989; Nurdinawati et al., 2026). In Southeast Asia and Indonesia, urbanization is imagined as a route to mobility and modern advancement, the evidence shows that migration unfolds across entangled rural and urban worlds instead of a clean break between them. Under precarious socio-economic conditions, however, migration overturns this promise by exposing marginalized people to insecure work, social exclusion, unstable support systems, and exploitative labor arrangements in urban and peri0urban economies (Griffin et al., 2024; Standing, 2016). This displacement produces a form of identity dislocation because migrants are not only relocated physically but also detached from familiar moral, communal, and affective frameworks. Studies of migration in Asia show that low-wage and transient migrants are kept in liminal positions, with weak rights, restricted integration, and spatial containment that deepens their sense of non-belonging (Ghosh, 2026; Ong, 1999).

In ‘Ema’, this condition is reflected in the movement from a rural collective order into an urban public sphere characterized by anonymity, weakened solidarity, and the erosion of local cultural norms (Wirth, 1938). When legitimate pathways to stable mobility are blocked, precarious migrants and youth turn to adaptive but destructive responses shaped by consumerism, deviance, or other compensatory subcultural practices (A. K. Cohen, 1955). Substance dependence and hedonistic coping appear less as isolated personal failures than as symptoms of alienation produced by inequality, anonymity, and consumer capitalism (S. Cohen, 2011). Urban migration can relieve material stress for some migrants, but it worsens affiliation related stress, fragments family care arrangements, and weakens the communal protections associated with village life (Nurdinawati et al., 2026). Read through this lens, Ema can be anchored in broader macroeconomic and socio-cultural transformations that show how physical dislocation can translate into moral, relational, and existential fragmentation (Polanyi, 2001; Putra et al., 2026).

Family Disintegration and Social Solidarity

At the domestic domain, individual deviance and substance abuse corrode the family as a primary institution of social protection, emotional support, and moral socialization, because destructive behavioral autonomy tends to undermine the household's affective, educational, and supervisory functions (Jones et al., 2024; Parsons et al., 1998). Family systems and close social networks can protect against or intensify substance dependence, which means that addiction and deviant behavior are embedded in relational dynamics instead of reducible to isolated personal choice (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Jones et al., 2024).

This disruption also generates intergenerational trauma and psychological strain within the family, for parents and kin who must absorb the emotional consequences of broken expectations, dysfunctional communication, and damaged caregiving relations (Bowlby, 1982; Pakbazi et al., 2024). Trauma is transmitted not only through dramatic events, but also through family communication styles, abusive or indifferent parenting, emotional withdrawal, guilt-inducing interaction, and the long-term reproduction of distress across generations. Poor mental health and family strain are also structured by broader social disadvantage, since unfavorable social conditions can reproduce cumulative vulnerability across the life course and across generations (Kirkbride et al., 2024).

Sundanese Moral Philosophy and Spiritual Profanization

In Sundanese society, ethical well-being is grounded in the holistic philosophy of pancawaluya, the values of cageur and bener. which frame a good life in terms of physical and spiritual health, moral integrity, social responsibility, and harmony with others rather than isolated individual autonomy (Kulsum et al., 2026). Within this worldview, well-being is collective, relational, and spiritual because the self is expected to remain aligned with community norms, religious commitments, and balance with nature (Kulsum et al., 2026; Maffesoli, 1996). When this philosophical foundation is weakened by modernization, secularism, and consumerist logics, it tends to generate a spiritual crisis marked by moral disorientation, inner emptiness, and alienation from transcendental values (Kierkegaard, 1980b). In contemporary Indonesia context, this condition appears when religious life is reduced to symbolic practice, while materialism, pleasure-seeking, and pragmatic self-interest displace ethical self-restraint and responsibility to others.

From the perspective of phenomenology of religion and philosophical sociology, this erosion of transcendence reflects a shift in which the sacred no longer regulates human

conduct with moral seriousness, and the distinction between the sacred and the profane becomes unstable (Eliade, 1957; Sully et al., 2026). That collapse becomes visible when religious and cultural forms are repurposed for political interests, market logics, digital convenience, or the display of piety, thereby emptying them of some of their original sacred force. In that context, the willingness to sacrifice personal honor and human dignity for illicit, degrading or consumptive ends signals as an ethical decline and a deeper process of moral profanization. Once normalized, this profanization fractures personal integrity, weakens cultural identity, and pushes the subject toward spiritual decadence, in which the moral and symbolic foundations of human life are progressively emptied of meaning (Marcel, 1978; Santoso et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative interpretive textual design that approaches popular music not as mere entertainment, but as a cultural artefact and a socially meaningful text open to critical analysis (Merriam, 1964). Because the object of analysis is a song, the research design is textual as well as socio-cultural, attending to the lived realities, values tensions, and identity negotiations of Sundanese society as it moves between inherited rural traditions and the pressure of urban modernization (Suryalaga, 2010). The corpus consists of the complete lyrics, narrative structure, and thematic imagery of Doel Sumbang's 'Ema (Edana Manusa)', which is chosen through sampling to match qualitative interpretive logic (Patton, 2015). The song is selected because its lyrical world evokes rural-urban mobility, shifting moral horizons, and the friction between local ethical traditions and metropolitan attractions, themes documented in anthropological studies of cultural transformation (Geertz, 1973). This includes the structural tensions between indigenous local wisdom and the hedonistic, commodified subcultures that under globalization and consumer capitalism (Harvey, 1989). These selection criteria are anchored in the song's vivid depiction of substance abuse, moral decadence, and pleasure-oriented urban lifestyles, aligning with foundational sociological framework on deviant subcultures and eroding ethical foundations. The study situates 'Ema' within the broader context of mediated popular culture, where digital circulation and public reception serve as critical sites for negotiating identity, social critique, and the paradoxes of globalization (Hall et al., 2003).

In this design, the researcher is the primary instrument, functioning as the critical reader, cultural interpreter, and coder who identifies patterns of meaning, symbolic structures, and sociocultural tensions embedded in the text (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tai et al., 2024). The data collection procedure begins with extracting, transcribing, and contextualizing the original Sundanese song lyrics together with standard Indonesian and English translation so that the semantic, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of the text remain analytically visible across languages. Because archival and manuscript-based materials often lose context through editorial reduction, classification, or digitization, each textual unit must be read not only as language but also as a culturally situated sign shaped by transmission history and interpretive framing. The next step is systematic archival coding to identify recurring motifs and narrative patterns, including the deformation of identity from sanity to edan, the commodification of the body for instant gratification, and the displacement of psychological burden onto indung bapa in the hometown.

Systematic coding is a necessary first stage of qualitative interpretation because it enables recurring themes, symbolic oppositions, and affective shifts to be organized transparently before they are synthesized into broader cultural meanings (Saldana, 2021). To interpret those motifs adequately, the study also catalogs external socio-cultural materials such as urbanization studies, migration scholarship, and Sundanese cultural literature, since textual meaning is inseparable from wider structures of modernization, mobility, identity tension, and local value transformation. This contextual layering is methodologically appropriate because cultural texts are not self-contained artifacts; they are social documents whose meanings become clearer when read alongside historical change, collective identity, and the pressures of globalization and commodification (Hall et al., 2013). Because the study does not involve interviews, observation, or any direct engagement with human participants, formal informed consent and institutional ethical clearance are not required for the textual corpus itself, although transparent documentation of analytic procedure remains essential for rigor.

The data analysis applies a multi-layered hermeneutic and sociological framework conducted in three sequential stages. First, through deconstructive close reading, the song is examined at the level of narrative voice, symbolic wording, and moral imagery in order to identify forms of individual alienation, norm erosion, and moral degradation, since

hermeneutic interpretation links each textual part to the meaning of the whole rather than extracting meaning from isolated lines (Lyhne et al., 2025; Ricoeur, 2016). This first phase treats the text as a socially meaningful cultural document whose signs must be interpreted contextually, while remaining explicit about analytic assumptions so that interpretation stays consistent with the study aim, research, questions, and dataset (Derrida, 1978; Lyhne et al., 2025). Second, the analysis move from the individual level to a relational and structural mapping of how deviant conduct expands into family strain, kinship weakening, and the erosion of communal ethics. This stage is grounded in the view that social solidarity forms collective consciousness and binds individuals to moral order, while rapid social change and weakened cohesion intensify isolation, distrust, and psychological fragmentation. In the Sundanese context, this breakdown is read against the weakening of silih asih, silih asah, and silih asuh, values that organize mutual care, guidance, shared learning, social harmony, dignity, and interdependence in communal life (Ahmad, 2025; Parsons, 1991).

Third, the study uses theoretical triangulation to cross-read the textual findings through Durkheimian social solidarity, Eliade's sacred-profane distinction, and broader models of moral disruption and social deviance. Durkheimian sociology clarifies how weakening religious or collective cohesion can produce wider social problems and social disintegration, while Eliadean hermeneutics clarifies how moral collapse may also be interpreted as a shift away from sacred order, meaning, and transcendence (Eliade, 1957). The final interpretive step therefore does not merely label themes, but integrates and tests them against a wider conceptual framework, including counterexamples and disconfirming possibilities, so that the reading remains analytically coherent and well supported. To establish validity, credibility, and trustworthiness, the study relies on theoretical triangulation, peer debriefing, and transparent documentation of the analytic process. Recent qualitative-methods literature consistently identifies credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as core quality criteria, and it specifically recognizes triangulation, audit trails, thick description, and peer debriefing as appropriate strategies for strengthening interpretive rigor and transparency (Patton, 2015). In that sense, the cultural critique derived from Ema is positioned as methodologically verifiable because its stages, assumptions, and interpretive decisions are made explicit and can be scrutinized by other scholars.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identity Deconstruction: From Cageur to the Reality of Edan

In traditional Sundanese thought, cageur denotes more than absence of bodily illness, it represents an ideal of human wholeness integrating physical health, mental stability, spiritual depth, and moral clarity within a single ethical vision of life (Widodo, 2021). Within the framework, health is understood as a condition of existential balance in which the individual sustains harmony within the self, with others, with nature, and with religious and customary norms (Kulsum et al., 2026). As one of the central values of pancawaluya, cageur operates within a broader moral order that also includes bageur, bener, pinter, and singer, showing that Sundanese well-being is collective, ethical, and spiritually grounded rather than individualistic. The ideal Sundanese person is expected to regulate conduct through conscience, honesty, and responsibility because moral life is shaped by continuous alignment with communal values and ethical norms. In this sense, cageur serves as a cultural and psychological safeguard against behavioral deviance by reinforcing self-acceptance, emotional resilience, empathy, and socially responsible action. When these values weaken under the pressure of globalization, individualism or moral disengagement, Sundanese society faces a broader cultural crisis marked by eroding identity, weaker ethical boundaries, and damage to the normative foundations of communal life.

The metropolis is imagined as a route to mobility and freedom, under capitalism, urbanization reorganizes migrant life through precarity, exclusion, and segmentation (Campbell & Laheij, 2021). Migrants are pushed into insecure labor markets and uneven urban infrastructures, where legal insecurity, weak welfare access, and labor-market exclusion intensify both material and psychological vulnerability. Urban life also weakens collective support, advanced marginality is marked by the loss of aspatial alienation, and reduced access to informal protection, so migrants confront the city as a stable community and a fractured social field. In this context, the conflict portrayed in Ema is best read as a structural clash between rural communal norms and urban consumer subcultures, since rapid urbanization exposes migrants to symbolic markets that sort people through status display, stigmatization, and competition over belonging.

Urban youth cultures do not simply express rebellion, they provide ways to fit in and stand out within anonymous cities, which helps explain why leisure, nightlife, and risky consumption can acquire social meaning (A. K. Cohen, 1955). The song's drug imagery should therefore not be reduced to individual moral failure, because substance use is liked to socially toxic environments, stress, marginalization, poor mental health, and weak social support. Studies of drug use in marginalized settings show that substances are used to manage trauma, stress, and alienation, even though this coping strategy reproduces harm and isolation. Read this way, the opening lyric serves as a cultural diagnosis of disoriented adaptation, the subject does not escape the urban system but sinks further into it, trading judgment and self-preservation for chemically mediated belonging in a city that has failed to provide humane forms of recognition.

This reading becomes sharper when placed against research on neoliberal subjectivity, which shows that consumer capitalism recasts persons as competitive, self-regulating consumers who seek value, stability, and identity through commodities rather than enduring communal bonds (McDonald et al., 2017). in such a regime, stimulants can be read as commodified promises of energy, confidence, pleasure, and pseudo-wholeness, filling not a biological lack but a symbolic emptiness produced by market-centered subject formation. Edan in the song is most read not as simple madness but as consciousness damaged by urban precarity and consumerist pressure, the subject remains aware of self-destruction, yet continues because recognition, aspiration, and social legibility have been reorganized around consumption, performance, and fleeting pleasure.

At the level of identity, stimulant become part of how the self is organized, because addiction is sustained through identity practices, social roles, and relational networks. This is why substance use is better understood as a relational practice that organizes affiliations, lifestyles¸ and horizons of recognition than as a personal decision. Under social pressure to appear acceptable, successful, and desirable, individuals can adopt a pseudo-identity that secures belonging while distancing them from an integrated sense of self, this appears explicitly as the druggie identity, a false identity used to gain acceptance when the true self is experienced as inadequate. Read through this lens, edan marks deconstruction of identity in which selfhood becomes unstable, the gap between the lived self and the desired self widens, and the subject depends on supplied images and roles.

This madness is not outside capitalism but functional to it, because neoliberal culture organizes subjectivity around self-management, personal reinvention, positivity, and responsibilized adaptation. Across these accounts, suffering is displaced from structural conditions onto the individual, who is told to solve insecurity through self-development, affect regulation, and consumption. The evidence supports this reading most clearly in cultural settings where media and institutional discourses reward autonomy, positivity, and self-responsibility as norms of personhood. In this sense, edan names the point at which the subject surrenders critical distance and accepts a consumerist identity as the price of recognition within neoliberal.

The metropolitan setting intensifies the crisis because contemporary cities concentrate exclusion and spatial inequality. This urban order also weakens the social supports that sustain people through transition, advanced marginality is marked by spatial alienation and the loss of a hinterland, while migrant identities formed under exclusion can defend dignituy. Consumer culture deepens this instability by sorting migrants and youth through symbolic boundaries, status competition, and rural–urban distinctions, so belonging in the city is often mediated by lifestyle display rather than durable solidarity. Under these conditions, artificial escapes become socially intelligible, risky subcultures and drug use can offer belonging, esteem, and a way to fit in and stick out in anonymous urban life, even while intensifying harm. The city therefore appears not as a humane medium of social integration but as a structural environment that can convert alienation into commodified coping, pushing vulnerable subjects to trade psychological wholeness for fragile, market-shaped survival.

Commodification of the Body and the Collapse of Personal Honor

Doel Sumbang's opening lyric, 'Keur naon silaing Ema, eta sirah gudag-gideg, make kacapnon hideung' serve a diagnostic acoustic archive of urban deviance. This close reading treats the song as a primary cultural text that registers the traumatic friction between rural roots and metropolitan subcultures. When analyzed through the lens of urban alienation and subcultural deviance theory, the depicted physical symptoms such wearing dark sunglasses indoors paired with uncontrollable, rhythmic head movements serves as unmistakable empirical signifiers of chemical intoxication, the consumption of

synthetic stimulants like ecstasy during underground wave or tripping sessions. The intentional self-destruction of cognitive shatters the traditional Sundanese concept of cageur. Instead of experiencing the city as a progressive site of modern emancipation, the subject submits to a sensory numbing environment where chemical dependency replaces relational self-awareness.

Building upon the literature review regarding spiritual emptiness and consumerist ideology, this deliberate adoption of physical and mental collapse embodies the concept of edan (madness) as s distorted adaptation to structural precarity. The subject's choice to blind their vision with dark sunglasses in an indoors setting signifies a radical retreat from reality, a severing of the ethical self-restraint required by indigenous heritage. This voluntary surrender of cognitive control strips away individual moral agency, illustrating how the pressure of urban consumer capitalism forces marginalized migrants into a state of inner alienation. The opening verse captures the precise moment where traditional mental clarity is legality and chemically traded for fleeting, synthetic euphoria, signaling the breakdown of the domestic and moral safeguards that once protected the individual within Sundanese society.

In traditional Sundanese ethics, harga diri serves as an absolute moral shield, kinship obligation, and spiritual equilibrium. The ethical concept rests on silih asih, silih asah, silih asuh binding the subject to a cosmological order of communal accountability. When internalized, it acts as a bulwark against deviance, ensuring conscience regulates social action. Its erosion signals a structural crisis damaging the foundations of Sundanese culture, as the subject loses the inner compass linking personal autonomy to collective survival. The collapse of this moral fortress under urban occurs because the metropolitan environment servers the scaffolding that sustains traditional ethics. Blocked by economic exclusion and unstable conditions, migrants face compounding vulnerabilities that ethical reflection. The city strips away support networks, extended kin, elders, and religious institutions, replacing them with impersonal market relations based solely on consumption and production. In this vacuum, communal filters disappear, leaving the subject without relational safety nets to prevent the abandonment of harga diri.

Substance addiction delivers the final blow to this moral stronghold, eroding the cognitive and neurochemical infrastructure required to uphold traditional values. Addictive disorders impair self-regulation and moral autonomy, replacing authentic

selfhood with a commodified, performative persona. Research on displaced populations confirms that post-migration loneliness and the loss of social control drive substance misuse, turning the harsh conditions of urban precarity into forces that undermine traditional ethics. The collapse of harga diri is a systemic destruction where urban structural failure and addiction converge to obliterate the final line of defense Sundanese culture built.

This dynamic triggers inner alienation, sacrificing human essence for momentary chemical satisfaction and exposing the city's failure to provide a humane environment. When legitimate avenues to mobility are blocked, marginalized subjects rely on artificial releases like ecstasy to numb their alienation, reducing cognitive systems to pseudo-coping mechanisms. Capitalism intensifies this exploitation, compelling individuals to submit to a competitive market logic that reduces human beings to instruments of production and consumption. Stripped of affective support networks, subjects become acutely vulnerable to the hollow promise of instant gratification offered by synthetic stimulants.

The sacrifice of human dignity for fleeting chemical satisfaction represents the triumph of consumer capitalism over moral autonomy. Psychoactive substance use serves as an integral mechanism of survival within a consumer society, keeping the neoliberal fantasy of instant fulfillment alive while blurring the boundaries between the authentic self and the commodity. The subject's body becomes a site of capitalist exchange, where substance use attempts to fill the existential void created by systemic alienation. As the lyrics capture this critical juncture, human dignity is subordinated to market logic, revealing how hedonistic urban subcultures enforce a standard where moral autonomy is surrendered for artificial pleasure and a hollow sense of belonging

Intergenerational Relations and the Trauma of Indung Bapa

In ‘Ema’destruction reaches beyond personal aberration, framing substance abuse as a force that breaches the domestic sphere and damages the family as the primary unit of social protection. Illicit drug use triggers family disintegration, diminishing the household's educational, supervisory, and affective capacities. This magnifies the tragedy beyond individual failure, turning the subject's collapse into a crisis where the home can no longer operate as a stable site of moral socialization. The song exposes how urban moral decadence destroys not only the self, but the intimate social fabric that once secured

it. This damage violates traditional Sundanese kinship ethics, as the self in this worldview is never viewed as isolated. Sundanese ethics are grounded in relational values like mutual affection, guidance, and care, binding individuals to a wider collective order. Thus, the plea "Sing nyaah ka diri sorangan… Sing karunya ka indung bapa" marks the breach of a collective ethic where self-care is inseparable from parental responsibility. Once self-restraint is abandoned, the act becomes a public betrayal of the kinship obligations that organize Sundanese moral life, transforming the body into a site where communal expectations of filial devotion are undone.

The heaviest burden of this downfall falls upon indung bapa in the hometown, who must absorb the psychological trauma, shame, and emotional fallout of a broken caregiving bond. Parental suffering involves heightened emotional strain, reduced reciprocity, and long-term risks of multi-generational distress when caregiving relations are severed. Because the subject's destructive autonomy reproduces suffering across descendants, the household is transformed from a sanctuary of primary socialization into a site of grief and structural exposure, as urban hedonism erodes affection, obligation, and moral continuity. In this context, self-care is not a private therapeutic choice but an ethical duty owed to a relational world that includes parents, kin, and the communal order. Because Sundanese well-being is collective and spiritual, any act of self-destruction exceeds the individual body, breaching the moral framework of pancawaluya where cageur and bener require responsibility to others. The lyric's force lies in exposing this ethical interdependence: to stop loving oneself is to stop honoring indung bapa, because the Sundanese self is constituted through kinship obligation and communal dignity.

This trauma becomes multi-generational because the damage enters the durable structure of kinship through broken expectations, communication breakdowns, and the failure of the family's protective role. Trauma is transmitted through emotional withdrawal, guilt, and the long-term reproduction of distress across lineages, forcing parents to carry the humiliation of a severed moral line. The subject's autonomy is thereby revealed as false, the emotional continuity and caregiving bond sustaining the family across time are destabilized. The household's transformation is a sharp diagnosis of urban decadence: once absorbed into hedonistic urban subcultures, the family ceases to operate as a primary shelter of moral socialization, becoming instead a damaged institution that absorbs the fallout of addiction, alienation, and broken reciprocity. Metropolitan life

systematically severs migrants from affective networks, communal filters, and durable village support structures, replacing them with anonymity and emotional distance. Read this way, the home is recast as a space of structural exposure, where parents and kin no longer reproduce ethical continuity but instead endure ruptured caregiving bonds and the enduring aftermath of moral decline.

The Crisis of Sundanese Cultural Ethics

Ema links domestic disruption with cultural fractures because individual deviance damages the family first, radiating as a breakdown of the communal bonds that have long organized Sundanese life. In this perspective, the household is the primary institution of solidarity. When its affective, supervisory, and educational capacities erode, the song documents the failure of the smallest moral unit sustaining the collective. The formulation of family strain, kinship decline, and the erosion of communal ethics remains decisive, Ema maps the passage from intimate damage to social disintegration, showing that collective collapse begins when everyday caregiving relations can no longer reproduce trust, discipline, and mutual obligation.

Sundanese well-being is collective, spiritual, and relational rather than individual, meaning the subject's descent into addiction signifies not only self-destruction but the collapse of the moral framework binding affection, guidance, and care into communal resilience. Read this way, Ema offers a sharp diagnosis of contemporary Sundanese society: modernization does not merely introduce new lifestyles, but displaces communal orientations with anonymity, market logic, and symbolic consumption, leaving solidarity thinner, kinship weaker, and inherited ethics more difficult to reproduce across generations.

Illicit drug use in Ema appears as a distorted adaptation to an urban order that fails to integrate migrants and instead pushes them toward artificial releases. Substance dependence and hedonistic coping serves less as isolated personal produced by inequality, anonymity, and consumer capitalism. This makes addiction sociological before it is moral: the subject is trapped in a metropolis promising mobility and freedom, but producing exclusion, precarity, and identity fracture. Under those conditions, hedonism becomes a compensatory script of survival, because blocked mobility and social exclusion leave consumerist subcultures and synthetic pleasure as the most available languages of belonging.

This crisis becomes systemic because communal safeguards meant to regulate conduct prove unable to withstand the scale of urban alienation and consumer homogenization. Metropolitan life strips individuals from the support networks, kin structures, and communal filters that once protected them in village life, replacing solidarity with anonymity, mistrust, and emotional distance. The song captures a moment where communal institutions are overwhelmed by globalization, digital circulation, and market logic, while the subject's body becomes the site where that failure is enacted through chemical dependency and commodified pleasure.

Ethical profanation begins when the Sundanese moral order of pancawaluya is displaced by secular individualism, consumer desire, and pleasure-seeking, even though that order defines well-being as collective, spiritual, and relational. Modernization and market logic weaken older moral frameworks by replacing communal orientations with consumption, symbolic status, and external models of selfhood, making the subject's ethical collapse inseparable from a broader reorganization of value. Within that shift, the sacred-profane boundary is emptied of force, because transcendence, conscience, and ethical self-restraint are displaced by false pleasure and instant gratification. The lyric world of Ema treats the sacrifice of human dignity for stimulants as a profanation of humanity itself, where personal honor is exchanged for commodified sensation.

The force of this profanation lies in its collective consequences. In Sundanese ethics, harga diri serve as cultural protections anchoring conscience to kinship obligation, mutual care, and communal accountability. Their erosion signals a compromise in the society's moral immune system rather than a single person's fall. Once profanization becomes normalized, it fractures integrity, weakens cultural identity, and hollows out the symbolic foundations enabling a community to reproduce moral seriousness across generations. Urban alienation intensifies this process by stripping subjects from kin networks, elders, and religious institutions, replacing them with impersonal market relations and consumerist standards of worth.

Doel Sumbang's lyric exceeds a moral warning because it stores a social history of value fracture, operating as a sociological and acoustic archive of Sundanese identity deformation under globalization, digital mediation, and unfiltered modernization. The song functions as an urgent cultural critique of structural crisis, targeting the wider reorganization of meaning, belonging, and moral agency in contemporary Sundanese

society. Ema preserves the soundscape of a transition where inherited ethical coordinates such as cageur and bener collide with urban consumerist and hedonistic subcultures that promise freedom while hollowing communal identity from within.

What makes the archive acoustic is that the lyric voice records structural tension through embodied signs of breakdown, turning intoxication, disorientation, and loss of self-control into audible traces of an urban order that fails to integrate migrants humanely. Metropolitan space in Ema is not a site of emancipation but of alienation, where anonymity, precarity, and market logic sever subjects from kinship, moral filters, and affective support networks rooted in village life. The song's tension is structural rather than nostalgic, demonstrating how local cultural roots are pressured by homogenizing modernity, consumer capitalism, and digitally mediated forms of belonging that recode dignity and identity in market terms.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Ema should be read as a cultural text that records the deformation of Sundanese identity under unfiltered modernization, where the collision between inherited values such as cageur and bener and urban hedonistic subcultures produces moral disorientation, damaged kinship, and weakened communal solidarity rather than only individual failure. The song therefore functions as a sociological and acoustic archive of structural crisis, preserving how globalization, digital mediation, consumerism, and metropolitan alienation erode silih asih, silih asah, and silih asuh while pushing the subject toward addiction, commodified selfhood, and the profanation of dignity. Its central contribution lies in showing that the tragedy in the lyrics is not simply personal decline, but a wider cultural trauma in which the family, the moral order, and the symbolic foundations of Sundanese life are all strained by urban modernity and consumer capitalism.

The reflection that follows is not a nostalgic return to the past, but the need to revitalize basic Sundanese values as cultural resilience in an era of modern disruption. The attached paper suggests that values with the ethical horizon of pancawaluya, remain crucial because they organize mutual care, dignity, responsibility, and collective moral balance rather than isolated individualism. Its practical implication is clear: when modernization weakens communal filters, affective support, and sacred ethical limits, cultural endurance

depends on renewing those local moral frameworks in forms that can still guide contemporary life. Read this way, Ema ends not only as a diagnosis of crisis, but as a warning that Sundanese society must actively reinterpret and strengthen its foundational values if it is to remain ethically coherent amid globalization and consumer homogenization.

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