



Music as a Medium of Peace: Sociological Analysis of “Heal the World” and SDGs Context

Musik sebagai Media Perdamaian: Analisis Sosiologis Lagu “Heal the World” dalam Konteks SDGs

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi nilai-nilai sosial dan kemanusiaan dalam lagu “Heal the World” karya Michael Jackson serta mengkaji relevansinya dengan realitas sosial dan Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDG 16: Perdamaian, Keadilan, dan Lembaga yang Kuat). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berdasarkan kerangka kerja yang diusulkan oleh John W. Creswell, di mana data terdiri dari kata-kata, frasa, dan kalimat yang diambil dari lirik lagu. Data dikumpulkan melalui dokumentasi dan penelitian perpustakaan, serta dianalisis melalui tahapan kondensasi data, pengkodean, identifikasi tema, dan interpretasi. Temuan penelitian mengungkap beberapa tema utama, yaitu perdamaian sebagai kondisi sosial yang ideal, kritik sosial terhadap ketidakadilan dan kurangnya empati, nilai-nilai kemanusiaan sebagai landasan harmoni sosial, serta tanggung jawab individu dalam menciptakan perubahan sosial. Lagu ini mencerminkan realitas sosial seperti konflik, ketidaksetaraan, dan penderitaan manusia, sekaligus berfungsi sebagai bentuk kritik sosial terhadap kondisi masyarakat. Kesimpulannya, “Heal the World” berperan ganda sebagai cerminan kondisi sosial dan sarana kritik sosial yang tetap relevan dalam masyarakat kontemporer serta mendukung nilai-nilai SDG 16.

Kata kunci: *Heal the World; Kritik Sosial; Literatur Sosiologi; Nilai-nilai Kemanusiaan; Tema Perdamaian*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of social and humanitarian values in the song “Heal the World” by Michael Jackson and to examine its relevance to social reality and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). This research employs a qualitative method based on the framework proposed by John W. Creswell, where the data consist of words, phrases, and sentences derived from the song lyrics. The data were collected through documentation and library research and analyzed through stages of data condensation, coding, theme identification, and interpretation. The findings reveal several major themes, namely peace as an ideal social condition, social criticism toward injustice and lack of empathy, humanitarian values as the foundation of social harmony, and individual responsibility in creating social change. The song reflects social realities such as conflict, inequality, and human suffering, while also functioning as a form of social criticism toward societal conditions. In conclusion, “Heal the World” serves as both a reflection of social conditions and a medium of social criticism that remains relevant in contemporary society and supports the values of SDG 16.

Keywords: *Heal the World; Humanitarian Values; Peace Theme; Social Criticism; Sociological Literature*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is one of the essential elements in human life as it functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium of expression that contains ideas, values, and social realities within society. Through literary works, authors are able to present representations of human experiences, both individual and collective, enabling readers to understand social, cultural, and humanitarian dynamics more comprehensively. In this perspective, literature can be seen as a reflection of life that records various social phenomena, including inequality, conflict, and the construction of moral values within society (Wellek & Warren, 1956). Literature also functions as a medium of representation in which social reality is not merely reflected in a direct way, but is reconstructed through symbolic and figurative language that allows multiple interpretations of meaning depending on cultural and ideological contexts (Sinaga et al., 2024).

Furthermore, literature plays a significant role in developing social awareness and empathy. Literary works are capable of evoking readers' emotional sensitivity toward various humanitarian issues occurring around them. Therefore, literature is not only interpreted as an aesthetic product but also as a medium of social criticism that contributes to social change. In this context, literary works are embedded within social discourse where meaning is constructed through power relations and ideological frameworks, making literature a space where social issues are not only represented but also critically examined (Ridwan et al., 2026). Thus, literature remains relevant in modern life as it helps individuals understand themselves as well as the social realities they encounter (Damono, 1978; Eagleton, 2003).

In this study, the literary work analyzed is the song *Heal the World*, popularized by Michael Jackson and released in 1991. The song is widely recognized as a work that carries strong humanitarian messages. Through its lyrics, the song conveys an invitation to create a better world by promoting values such as love, care, and empathy toward others. These values are reflected in several key lines that represent the central themes of the song, such as peace, as seen in "Together we'll cry happy tears, see the nations turn their swords into plowshares," which expresses hope for a world free from conflict; social criticism, in "Then why do we keep strangling life, wound this Earth, crucify its soul?" which criticizes destructive human behavior; humanitarian values, in "In my heart I feel you are all my brothers," emphasizing universal brotherhood; and individual responsibility, in "We could really get there, if you cared enough for the living," highlighting the importance of personal contribution to social change. The meaning conveyed in song lyrics is often constructed through both denotative and connotative interpretations, where semantic understanding plays an important role in shaping how humanitarian messages are perceived by listeners (Atuzzahro et al., 2025).

Thematically, *Heal the World* represents a world that is still filled with various social problems, such as suffering, injustice, conflict, and a lack of empathy among individuals. The song also highlights social issues affecting vulnerable groups, particularly children, thereby strengthening the humanitarian message it delivers. In addition, the song provides significant benefits in enhancing social awareness and humanitarian values. Its lyrics are able to evoke listeners' empathy toward various social problems such as poverty, injustice, and human suffering. These representations show that literary works function as a medium of social representation that transforms real-life experiences into symbolic expressions capable of raising awareness and empathy in society (Junita & Fitrah, 2026). In this context, the work does not merely function as entertainment but also as a medium of moral education that encourages the development of more caring and humanistic social attitudes (Nurgiyantoro, 2009).

Furthermore, the song functions as a medium for self-reflection as well as social criticism. Listeners are invited to evaluate their attitudes and behaviors toward others and to recognize the importance of empathy in social life. The song implicitly criticizes the lack of empathy in modern society while offering solutions through real actions that begin at the individual level (Habermas, 1984).

Several previous studies have analyzed the song *Heal the World* by Michael Jackson from different perspectives. For instance, a study by Hidayat & Simatupang, (2023) focuses on a syntactic and semantic analysis of the song lyrics, examining how linguistic structures contribute to meaning construction.

Similarly, Suparman, (2021) analyzes the semantic aspects of figurative language in the song, particularly how metaphors and other stylistic devices convey meaning. However, these studies mainly focus on linguistic, semantic, and pedagogical aspects of the song, while the analysis of meaning construction in relation to broader social context, representation of social reality, and humanitarian discourse remains limited (Jatikusumo, 2012).

While these studies provide valuable insights into the linguistic and pedagogical aspects of *Heal the World*, they tend to focus primarily on textual and language-based analysis, such as syntax, semantics, and figurative language. However, they do not sufficiently explore the broader social context reflected in the song, particularly how the lyrics represent social realities such as conflict, inequality, and humanitarian issues. In addition, these studies have not examined the song through a sociological literature approach nor connected its messages to contemporary global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing *Heal the World* using a sociological approach to literature and by linking its humanitarian messages to SDG 16 in the context of current social conditions. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the song not only as a moral message but also as a reflection of social realities and a contribution to global peace discourse.

Based on this background, the research questions of this study are: (1) how are social and humanitarian values represented in *Heal the World*; and (2) how does the song reflect social conditions in society? This study aims to analyze the representation of social values in the song and to examine its relevance to social reality. It is expected that this research will contribute to literary studies, particularly in understanding the role of songs as a medium of social reflection.

In addition, this study is also related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly United Nations SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, ensuring access to justice, and building effective, accountable institutions. In the contemporary global context, many regions still face serious challenges such as armed conflict, social inequality, human rights violations, and structural injustice, which hinder the realization of sustainable peace. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, issues such as violence and weak governance systems further obstruct efforts to achieve sustainable development and social stability (Milton, 2020). In addition, armed conflict is widely recognized as a major barrier to the achievement of SDG 16, as it often results in humanitarian crises, civilian suffering, and the breakdown of essential social and institutional systems (Druce et al., 2019). These conditions indicate that achieving SDG 16 remains a significant global concern.

Within this context, literary works such as *Heal the World* by Michael Jackson can be seen as cultural responses to global social issues, reflecting humanitarian concerns that align with Sustainable Development Goal 16, particularly in promoting peace, empathy, and collective responsibility. Literature is widely recognized as a medium that can foster empathy, critical awareness, and social responsibility among audiences, particularly in relation to global issues of peace and human dignity (UNESCO, 2019). Such perspectives are consistent with the view that issues of conflict, inequality, and governance remain central challenges in achieving sustainable peace (Milton, 2020).

The song's message encourages individuals to reject violence, care for others, and contribute to building a more just and peaceful society. Therefore, analyzing this song is important not only to understand its moral and social messages but also to demonstrate how literature can function as a medium that supports global agendas such as SDG 16, especially in contexts where conflict continues to generate humanitarian crises and disrupt social stability (Druce et al., 2019).

REVIEW TEORI

This study employs the sociology of literature approach as the main theoretical framework. The sociology of literature views literary works as social products that cannot be separated from the societal

context in which they are created. This approach emphasizes the relationship between literature and social reality, including the values, norms, ideologies, and social dynamics reflected within literary texts (Alwaqaa, 2020; Laurenson & Swingewood, 1972). Through this perspective, literature is understood not only as an aesthetic expression but also as a medium that reflects and responds to social conditions.

In addition, contemporary studies also emphasize that literature functions as a reflection of social realities, where texts are shaped by and simultaneously represent ideological, cultural, and societal structures (Rojas-sotelo, 2022). This strengthens the view that literary works cannot be separated from the social environment in which they are produced.

In the sociology of literature, literary works are often considered representations of social life because they contain depictions of human experiences, conflicts, and social issues occurring within society. Literature may also function as a form of social criticism that reveals inequality, injustice, and humanitarian problems. Therefore, analyzing literary works through a sociological perspective enables researchers to understand how social realities are constructed and represented within texts.

This study also uses the concept of social criticism to examine how the song *Heal the World* conveys criticism toward violence, suffering, lack of empathy, and destructive human behavior. Social criticism in literary works generally appears through expressions, symbols, and messages that encourage audiences to reflect on social conditions and moral values within society (Panggabean & Nofrita, 2025). In this context, literary works are often considered a reflection of social reality, where authors represent societal issues such as inequality, injustice, and humanitarian problems through their texts (Alsyrad & Rosa, 2020).

Therefore, the song functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium that promotes humanitarian awareness and social responsibility (Alsyrad & Rosa, 2020). To achieve the objectives of this study, this research employs a qualitative research framework proposed by John W. Creswell. This framework is used to systematically analyze the song lyrics through processes of data condensation, coding, theme identification, and interpretation. By applying this approach, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how social and humanitarian values are represented in *Heal the World* and how these values relate to contemporary social realities and SDG 16 (Junita & Fitrah, 2026).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the meaning and social values presented in the song "Heal the World" by Michael Jackson. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because the data are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences that require interpretation rather than numerical analysis. As stated by Creswell, (2014), qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning from textual data and interpreting social phenomena. The data of this study consist of words, phrases, and sentences taken from the lyrics of the song "Heal the World". The primary data source is the official lyrics of the song, while the secondary data are obtained from books, journal articles, and other relevant sources related to sociology of literature and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, literary works can be analyzed as reflections of social reality, making them relevant sources for sociological analysis. The data were collected using documentation and library research techniques. The documentation technique was applied by identifying and selecting relevant lyrics that reflect the theme of peace and humanitarian values. Meanwhile, library research was conducted to obtain supporting theories and references related to sociological perspectives and SDGs. As explained by Alan Swingewood, literary texts can function as social documents that reveal the values and conditions of society. The data analysis was conducted using the model proposed by Miles et al., (2014) which includes data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In addition, this study also adopts John W. Creswell's framework (2014), which involves organizing and preparing data, reading the entire data, coding, generating themes, presenting data, and interpreting the findings. These methods enable the researcher to systematically identify themes related to hope for peace and interpret their sociological meanings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes Michael Jackson's song "Heal the World" using the sociological approach to literature developed by Alan Swingewood. The findings of this study focus on several key themes that

emerge in the song's lyrics, namely themes of peace, social criticism of injustice, human values, and the role of the individual in bringing about social change.

The research findings are presented in a table containing song lyrics, themes, and brief interpretations to illustrate the results of the analysis of the song "Heal the World."

Table 1. Brief Interpretations of the Song "Heal the World"

No	Theme	Lyric	Short Meaning
1	Peace	"Together we'll cry happy tears, See the nations turn their swords into plowshares"	Expresses the hope for global peace, where nations move away from war and conflict toward a harmonious and peaceful life.
2	Social Criticism	" Then why do we keep strangling life, Wound this Earth, crucify its soul?"	Criticizes human actions that damage life and the environment despite being aware of their harmful consequences.
3	Humanitarian Values	" In my heart I feel you are all my brothers"	Shows a sense of human brotherhood based on love and empathy among individuals.
4	Individual Responsibility	"We could really get there, if you cared enough for the living"	Emphasizes that positive social change can be achieved if individuals show sufficient care and concern for life.

1. Representation of Peace as an Ideal Social Condition

This theme explores the ideal state of the world, where people live in peace without conflict or suffering. This is reflected in the lyrics "Heal the world, make it a better place, for you and for me and the entire human race" from Michael Jackson's song "Heal the World." These lyrics express the hope for a better world for all humanity. The phrase "the entire human race" indicates that this peaceful state is universal and not limited to a specific group, but is intended for all people in the world.

Furthermore, the lyric "See the nations turn their swords into plowshares" expresses the hope for peace among nations. The use of the word "swords" symbolizes war and conflict, while "plowshares" symbolizes a productive and peaceful life. This depicts a shift from a state of conflict toward harmonious cooperation among nations.

In addition, the lyric "Make a little space, make a better place" also represents an effort to create a better and more peaceful environment. This lyric highlights the importance of making room for the creation of a safe and comfortable life for every individual.

2. Social Criticism toward Injustice and Lack of Empathy

This theme addresses the human condition, which is rife with conflict, injustice, and suffering, conditions that should instead be peaceful and safe. This is reflected in the lyric "There are people dying" from the song "Heal the World," which serves as a form of social critique of a society where lives are still being lost due to unsafe environments, such as conflict, poverty, and hunger.

Additionally, the lyrics "Then why do we keep strangling life, wounding this Earth, crucifying its soul" also express strong criticism of human behavior that tends to destroy life and the environment. These lyrics depict human greed, which often exploits the Earth for personal gain without considering the impact on social life and the surrounding environment.

3. Humanitarian Values as the Foundation of Social Harmony

This theme explores how human values such as love and empathy are an essential part of every person and form the foundation of social harmony. This is reflected in the lyric "There's a place in your heart, and I know that it is love," which suggests that every individual possesses a sense of love within themselves. This lyric illustrates that love is a natural part of being human and can serve as the foundation for positive social relationships.

Furthermore, the lyric “Love is strong, it only cares for joyful giving” shows that love has the power to drive acts of compassion and joy. Love is not merely understood as a feeling but also as a driving force for giving and creating goodness for others.

Additionally, the lyric “In my heart I feel you are all my brothers” depicts a sense of brotherhood among humans. This lyric shows that through love and empathy, people can view one another as brothers who need to care for and respect one another, thereby fostering harmonious social relationships.

4. Individual Responsibility in Creating Social Change

This theme explores the role of individuals in driving social change toward a safer and better environment. This is reflected in the lyric “If you care enough for the living, make a better place,” which suggests that an individual’s concern for life can serve as the foundation for creating a better environment. This lyric underscores the importance of personal awareness in paying attention to the social conditions around us.

Furthermore, the lyric “And if you really try, you’ll find there’s no need to cry” illustrates that individual efforts and actions can have a positive impact on others. This lyric shows that change, even if it starts with small steps, still contributes to the improvement of social conditions. Additionally, the lyric “We could really get there, if you cared enough for the living” emphasizes that individual care can be the key to achieving better social conditions in line with shared hopes.

The song “Heal the World” was released in 1991 amid various global humanitarian issues, including armed conflicts, poverty, hunger, and the suffering of children. In this context, the song can be understood as a social response that reflects concerns about the condition of society at that time.

Based on the analysis, four major themes were identified in the song: peace, social criticism, humanitarian values, and individual responsibility. From the perspective of Alan Swingewood’s sociology of literature, these themes demonstrate that literary works can function as reflections of social realities and as forms of social criticism. The theme of peace reflects aspirations for a world free from conflict and violence, while the theme of social criticism highlights concerns regarding inequality, suffering, and the lack of social awareness. The humanitarian values presented in the lyrics emphasize the importance of empathy, compassion, and solidarity as foundations for social harmony. Meanwhile, the theme of individual responsibility underscores the role of personal awareness and action in creating positive social change.

The relevance of these themes remains evident in contemporary society. Although the forms of conflict and social problems have evolved, issues such as inequality, humanitarian crises, social fragmentation, and declining empathy continue to affect many communities worldwide. Therefore, the song’s message remains significant as a reminder of the importance of collective responsibility in building a more peaceful and just society.

Furthermore, the findings align with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions. Through its messages of peace, empathy, and social responsibility, “Heal the World” indirectly supports efforts to reduce conflict and strengthen social harmony.

The novelty of this study lies in its use of a sociological literary approach to analyze the song. While previous studies have primarily focused on semantic and pragmatic aspects of the lyrics, this research connects the song to broader social contexts, both at the time of its release and in the present day. Consequently, the study demonstrates that songs can be understood not only as artistic expressions but also as representations of social realities and instruments of social critique.

IMPLICATION

1. Teoritis

The implications of this study suggest that the song “Heal the World” can be examined not only through semantic and pragmatic approaches but also analyzed using Alan Swingewood’s sociological approach to literature. This reinforces the idea that musical works should not be understood merely as linguistic texts but also as reflections of social conditions and forms of critique against existing social structures. Thus, this study contributes to literary studies that connect literary works with the social reality of society.

2. Praktis

In practical terms, this study is expected to raise public awareness—particularly among the younger generation—that songs serve not only as entertainment but also convey social messages relevant to real life. By understanding this, listeners are expected to become more sensitive to social issues such as conflict, injustice, and a lack of empathy, and to take a greater interest in the social conditions around them.

CONCLUSION

Based on the sociological analysis of Michael Jackson's song "Heal the World" in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), several key conclusions can be drawn :

First, this study finds that "Heal the World" serves as a powerful medium of moral education and social reflection. Through the lens of Alan Swingewood's sociology of literature, the song is not merely an aesthetic work of art but a "social document" that represents universal humanitarian values. Themes of peace, empathy, and love are prominently constructed in the lyrics as essential foundations for building a better society. The song effectively invites listeners to look within themselves and recognize their capacity to care for others, especially vulnerable groups such as children.

Second, the song accurately reflects the social realities and conflicts of the modern world. Its lyrics highlight systemic issues such as poverty, injustice, and the lack of human empathy that lead to suffering and environmental degradation. By portraying these "social wounds," the song acts as a form of social criticism, challenging the indifference of society and urging a transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

Finally, the messages in "Heal the World" are highly relevant to the global framework of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The call for global solidarity and the cessation of conflict aligns with the United Nations' goal of creating inclusive and harmonious societies. This research demonstrates that music can function as a significant cultural tool in promoting sustainable development by fostering the social awareness and individual responsibility necessary to achieve a peaceful world. In summary, Michael Jackson's work transcends its era by providing a timeless roadmap for social change, emphasizing that the journey toward a "better place" begins with the collective and empathetic actions of individuals.

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