



The Construction of Resistance in the Lyrics of the Song “Bayar Bayar Bayar” by the Band Sukatani

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Abstract. This study analyzes the creation of meanings of resistance and social criticism in the lyrics of the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar" by the band Sukatani, which went viral in the Indonesian digital public sphere. This study uses Roland Barthes's semiotics approach to interpret the meanings on the three levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. The data in this study were song lyrics, which were qualitatively analyzed with a descriptive-interpretive method. At the denotative level, it refers to the practice of "paying" in various activities involving the police. On the connotative level, repetition of "pay" suggests the idea that extortion has become an informal mechanism that is already established and practiced between society and the police. The myth level indicates the normalization of social reality, which is perceived as a practice of extortion that is common, and not usually critically examined. The phenomenon of viral popularity of "Bayar Bayar Bayar" affirms that music is the space of symbolic resistance that articulates the public's dissatisfaction with the abuse of power and violation of public rights. This study adds a value to communication and semiotics research in which song lyrics have become a space for producing meaning, social criticism and ideology in the digital sphere.

Keywords: Bayar Bayar Bayar; Community; Music; Song; Sukatani.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital technology, the music industry has continued to develop in line with current trends. Digital technology itself is the basis of digitization and makes a major contribution to the music industry, particularly in the fields of production, distribution and consumption (Imawan & Sari, 2019). Sukatani, as a punk rock band from Purbalingga, East Java utilized the technology where Sukatani was already very popular since the beginning of their involvement in the Indonesian music industry with a mission to voice social criticism through songs like "Gelap Gempita", "Mimpi di Siang Bolong", "Sukatani", etc. Of the many songs they have performed, there is a song entitled "Bayar Bayar Bayar" which has caused unrest and controversy in society since it strongly criticized the Indonesian National Police.

The lyrics of "Bayar Bayar Bayar" were considered to be able to describe the public's dissatisfaction with the prevalence of extortion practices committed by the Indonesian National Police. In a direct and satiric form, the lyrics depict the condition of power and the disparity with social justice as perceived by the lower class. Through their boldness, Sukatani has become an icon of struggle against injustice, especially among young people who use music as a social statement medium.

In fact, although it was widely appreciated by the public "Bayar Bayar Bayar" song triggered negative reactions from the police. The Indonesian National Police deemed the lyrics inappropriate for their organization, and could cause negative responses among the public. The conflict did not stop at public discussion, and even resulted in the dismissal of the vocalists from Sukatani's band, Novi Citra Indriati, a teacher at SD Islam Terpadu Mutiara Hati. The issue also resulted in the removal of "Bayar Bayar Bayar" from all music platforms such as Spotify, Youtube and Apple Music.

The conflict between the police and Sukatani, with the "Bayar Bayar Bayar" song is a strong indication of the conflict between freedom of expression and the value of morality, when it comes to criticism expressed in the form of music. On the one hand, the musical form is considered a work of art that expresses social reality and criticizes society. "Social criticism" is defined as a phrase comprised of two terms: criticism and social (Lestari et al., 2019). On the other hand, it is subject to certain moral values and institutional norms that establish the boundary for freedom of expression in Indonesia. This condition is interesting to research.

There are indications of an ambiguity of meanings of "Bayar Bayar Bayar" song, and the matter must be discussed, whether "Bayar Bayar Bayar" song is a purely social critique carried in the name of justice, or simply the voice of the personal subjective feeling of the Sukatani band, who have certain interests. This understanding is crucial so that it can create a positive understanding in analyzing the song, instead of only assessing it as something controversial, and by the creators, the Sukatani band themselves (Street, 2012).

Similarly to the previous ones, there is research by Jarot Ariyantono et al. (2025) with the title "A Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure's Representation of Social Criticism in the Lyrics of 'Bayar Bayar Bayar'", which explains the representation of social criticism through signs in the lyrics of Sukatani band's song, and also Raihan and Winduwati (2023) research with the title "Social Criticism in Songs: A Semiotic Analysis of 'Tiba-Tiba Batu' by Efek Rumah Kaca," explains how social and moral criticism can be presented (Ariyanto et al., 2025; Raihan & Winduwati, 2023).

Based on the above discussion, the research questions formulated are (1) How can social criticism be portrayed in the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar?" (2) To what extent is social criticism in "Bayar Bayar Bayar" expressed?, and (3) What are the meanings contained in the lyrics of the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar?" by Sukatani band? The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the meaning and form of social criticism in the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar" by Sukatani band using Roland Barthes's semiotics approach.

This study is expected to provide benefits theoretically, enrich research in the field of linguistics, communication studies, social criticism, and literature, particularly semiotic analysis of musical works as a means of social criticism. And the practical benefit of this study is to provide information for professionals in the music industry, musicians, researchers, and the public, in understanding the musical form as a media that conveys social messages appropriately, according to norms, and respects the limits of free expression in the public sphere.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on research conducted by (Ariyanto et al., 2025), the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar" by Sukatani is a form of social criticism of the practice of illegal garbage collection by unscrupulous police, with the phrase "pay the police" as a satirical symbol that many matters involving the police are often associated with informal payments. Meanwhile, Raihan & Winduwati (2023) concluded that the song "Tiba-Tiba Batu" by Efek Rumah Kaca is a moral criticism of people's behavior on social media and conveys humanitarian values and responsibility in expression through media (Azis, 2016).

Based on two previous studies, this study uses Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotics theory and a different study object from Raihan & Winduwati (2023), which focuses on the ambiguity of meaning and message of the lyrics of the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar". This study is expected to be a reference for the music industry, researchers, and the public in understanding music as a means of social expression and communication of constructive criticism without misunderstanding or conflict, as well as enriching linguistic studies, communication science, social criticism, and related literature on the mechanism of message delivery through music media.

In popular culture, songs serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium for resistance against social, political, and economic injustice. According to Street (2012), songs can build solidarity and collective feelings among oppressed groups (Street, 2012). Social criticism itself is a form of evaluation of social phenomena deemed to deviate from the values of truth, morality, and humanity. Machsunah & Andriany (2024) explain that social criticism is a moral action against the dominance of power, injustice, and violations of human values (Machsunah & Andriany, 2024). In works of art, social criticism can take the form of direct, symbolic, or ideological criticism (Ratna, 2011). Sukatani's song "Bayar Bayar Bayar" can be categorized as symbolic and ideological criticism because it uses the repetition of the word "bayar" to satirize the practice of extortion and society's dependence on unhealthy transactions.

Popular media has evolved alongside advances in communication technology and plays a crucial role in the dissemination of culture and the formation of public perception. According to Storey (2009), popular culture is the process of producing and consuming cultural products that represent values, ideologies, and social identities (Storey, 2009). Music is one of the primary media of popular culture, serving as a space for the formation of meaning, identity, and social resistance (Storey, 2003). Furthermore, music also reflects the social and political conditions of a nation (Brewin, 2013). Therefore, the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar" can be understood as a form of social criticism against the practice of extortion, which is considered unfair. In its dissemination, mass media serves as an arena for the formation and debate of social discourse (McQuail, 2010), although it remains influenced by societal norms, values, and ethics (Couldry, 2012).

This study uses Roland Barthes's semiotics to analyze the meaning in song lyrics. Barthes developed Saussure's theory by viewing signs as part of a broader system of cultural meaning (Barthes, 1977). According to Barthes (1972), meaning operates on three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1977). At the denotative level, the lyrics depict the practice of recurring payments in the relationship between society and the police; at the connotative level, the lyrics represent a critique of the abuse of power and injustice; while at the mythical level, the lyrics reflect ideologies about oppression and social resistance. Through an analysis of signs and symbols in the song, this study aims to understand the construction of socially critical messages and the role of songs as a means of social expression and communication (Anugrah et al., 2025).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis method to explore the meanings, messages, and symbols contained in Sukatani's song "Bayar Bayar Bayar." This approach was chosen because qualitative research aims to understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to social or humanitarian issues (Creswell, 2014). Using Barthes's semiotics, the analysis focuses on denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings to uncover the construction of meaning and ideology contained in the song's lyrics.

The subject of the study is the music group Sukatani, the composer and singer of the song, which went viral in 2025 for its sharp criticism of extortion practices within the Indonesian National Police. In this study, Sukatani is viewed not only as the composer but also as a social agent voicing public concerns. The object of this study is the lyrics of the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar," while the primary research instrument is the researcher herself, who acts

as planner, implementer, data collector, analyst, and interpreter of the research results (Creswell, 2014), supported by observation guidelines, in-depth interviews, and documentation.

The primary data for this study are the lyrics of the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar," while additional data were obtained through in-depth interviews with relevant parties, such as Sukatani personnel and local music activists in Indramayu. Secondary data came from semiotics books, scientific journals, mass media, online news, and research related to music as a medium for social criticism. Data collection was conducted through documentation of song lyrics, online news, and public responses on social media; observation of public reactions in digital spaces; and in-depth interviews to explore the public's views, experiences, and interpretations of the social criticism conveyed in the song.

Data analysis utilized Roland Barthes's (1972) semiotics, which encompasses three levels of meaning: denotative, which seeks to understand the literal meaning of signs; connotative, which identifies hidden messages and social criticism; and mythical, which reveals ideologies related to justice, power, and resistance to injustice. This online study, conducted in November 2025, utilized data from YouTube, social media, and online news portals to determine whether the song "Bayar Bayar Bayar" constitutes a social critique for justice or simply a subjective expression of the Sukatani band.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

There were three methods used for data collection: observation, interview and document analysis. The findings from observation, according to news reporting on Antara News portal (Figure 1) showed that some of the netizens commented that the criticism on the song conveyed is what actually people feel from the social reality they face everyday. They said that people have been feeling that those criticized are not the figment of fiction, but a fact in the society and institutions reply seems defending the criticism. This indicated that the trending of the song of Bayar Bayar Bayar does not only emerge as a musical work, but also became public discourse arena, the existence of the news and netizens responses strengthened and complement one another to generate the meaning of resistance on the society.



Figure 1. News from @Tempo.com Via the X Platform Regarding the Viral Song “Bayar Bayar Bayar” by the Band Sukatani

Source: <https://x.com/antaranews/status/1892513488838529051?s=46>

The lyric on Bayar bayar bayar itself is a criticism directed toward the corruptions and extortions of police, therefore it is understandable to get a response in form of reflection, condemnation and attack from netizens. Another one post on Tempo (Figure 3) showed a reflection of change on police image through generations, and mentions extortion and abusing power still occur. Hence, people do not understand the song as the meaning-implying text, but a representation for the social phenomenon they have been experiencing in the real world. In fact, some comments even made relation with national leader, like Prabowo Subianto, and the national police chief, Listyo Sigit Prabowo, meaning the trending on the song led to a moral and politic issue toward the state. Therefore negative meanings on Bayar Bayar Bayar not only multiplied by mainstream media, but also by public voices over social media, turning into a driving force of frustration, a structural critique, and hope for effective change.



Figure 2. News from @Tempo.com via the X platform regarding the viral song “Bayar Bayar Bayar” by the band Sukatani

Source: <https://x.com/tempodotco/status/1892819218187637117?s=46>

The next finding came from an interview with Alectroguy, a stage name for the guitarist of Sukatani band. Based on the interview, the word 'pay' in the lyric of "Bayar Bayar Bayar" is a representation for acts of corruption or extortion committed by some individuals that occurs commonly in people's life. The word 'pay' is considered to be most appropriate because it is easy to be understood and related to the everyday life. Therefore the repetitions of the word 'pay' in the song, together with repetitive melody, are used to reemphasize the meaning so that the criticism on the song be better conveyed and remain in people's memory. Overall, Alectroguy wishes to convey and represent the everyday life in which people has been accustomed to 'pay' as one element of every structural issue faced.

The lyric was created based on the unease feelings and he aims the song to not just be a critique, but also to generate people's experiences whether they feel or are actually experiencing. The word 'pay' then becomes a symbol of dependence on material things in which social relationship and administration are often dependent on money instead of justice or regulation. The habit of 'paying' is more likely to lead people to perceive the negative meanings implied in the song due to the Indonesian society's behavior on 'paying' to skip the actual procedures. Thus, people tend to relate the songs with such social expression where dissatisfaction is expressed through irony, straight talk, or cultural phenomena such as songs to represent their feeling that can not be presented through formal mechanism.

Discussion

The notion of semiotics as the study of meaning-making systems was expanded upon in the mid-20th century by Roland Barthes. His semiotics differs from Ferdinand de Saussure's initial proposal that "the sign is nothing more than a bond between concept and word" by arguing that the sign is not the end point but instead a conduit for more complex system of meaning within culture. Barthes' approach to semiotics, then, offers a way of analysing how meaning is created, circulated, and understood within a specific socio-cultural context. In applying this approach, cultural texts such as advertisements, films, and songs are analysed through the construction of meaning.

Barthes claims that the sign system has two layers of meaning, denotation and connotation. The denotative meaning is "a fundamental, denotive signification," which arises from the literal relationship between signifier and signified. The connotative meaning is an "adjoined" layer of signification which "depends upon the ideological, social and cultural usage of a word." It is for this reason that any sign is never neutral, as all signs "carry with them the values and ideologies produced by society."

Barthes introduced the concept of myth which he defines as a "second-order system of signs," whereby "ideology is presented in the guise of signs that are seemingly natural." Mythological meaning occurs where the words within the song, besides having an explicit meaning, reflect a deeper social myth about injustice, abuse of power and resistance towards authority. By separating the song into two major sections the verse and chorus, the verse is identified as having an semantic function in that it establishes the social situation. The chorus, then, functions as an emotional and ideological confirmation through its repetition. Therefore, meaning-making in this song moves from reality to social myth.

Table 1. Roland Barthes’s Semiotic Analysis of the First Verse of the Song “Bayar Bayar Bayar”

Lyrics: Verse 1	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
<i>Mau bikin SIM, bayar polisi</i>	Presenting administrative matters	Creating the impression that the practice of	Normalizing illegal fees as part of everyday life.
<i>Ketilang di jalan, bayar polisi</i>	related to the processing of permits, violations, activities, and operations associated with payment	“paying” has become an unwritten mechanism that accompanies nearly every interaction	As a result, the public no longer openly questions this practice; instead, they consider it normal.
<i>Touring motor gede, bayar polisi</i>	activities	between citizens and officials.	
<i>Angkot mau ngetem, bayar polisi</i>			

In analysing the first verse of 'Bayar Bayar Bayar,' the words 'Mau bikin SIM, bayar polisi/Ketilang di jalan, bayar polisi/Touring motor gede, bayar polisi/Angkot mau ngetem, bayar polisi' construct meaning on several levels contributing to the viral success of the song. Denotatively, the lyrics establish a reality familiar to most people (processing SIMs, traffic tickets, motorcycle rides, catching public transport) associated with the action of 'paying'. Connotatively, the repetition of 'pay the police' across these different situations suggests that 'paying' has become the unwritten mechanism attached to almost all dealings between citizens and the police. It is the commonality and 'truth' of this meaning that led so many listeners to feel that their own realities were being depicted, leading to widespread circulation on social media. Mythologically, these lyrics demonstrate the gradual development of 'paying' as part of everyday life the situation in which a citizen encounters the police in so many different contexts of administrative and everyday activities leads to 'paying' being accepted as something difficult to avoid. When this is so, a citizen has no reason to critically question the practice; instead, it is likely to be passively accepted.

Table 2. Roland Barthes’s Semiotic Analysis of Verse 2 of the Song “Bayar Bayar Bayar”

Lyrics: Verse 2	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
<i>Mau bikin gigs, bayar polisi</i> <i>Lapor barang hilang, bayar polisi</i> <i>Masuk ke penjara, bayar polisi</i> <i>Keluar penjara, bayar polisi</i>	Accurately depicting a wide range of formal and critical situations in social life, from creative activities and public service to the most extreme legal proceedings	Developing a deeper understanding of the broad scope of the practice of “paying,” which extends not only to minor matters but also to serious issues such as the law and individual freedoms.	The belief that money can control nearly all social and legal processes.

Analyzing the second verse of 'Bayar Bayar Bayar', the lyrics 'Mau bikin gigs, bayar polisi/Lapor barang hilang, bayar polisi/Masuk ke penjara, bayar polisi/Keluar penjara, bayar polisi' show a further development of the critical meaning in the song. Denotatively, these lyrics describe extremely serious and important situations (starting an event, reporting something missing, entering or exiting prison) associated with the act of 'paying'. Connotatively, by increasing the severity of situations which 'paying the police' is associated with, the repetition of the phrase highlights that 'paying the police' is no longer confined to administrative or minor matters but can encompass law and justice. It is the construction of this meaning that resonated with many as a reflection of a social truth, as evidenced by online responses and media coverage. Mythologically, these lyrics suggest that the practice of 'paying the police' can essentially achieve any goal it does not matter if it is an important, formal occasion or if it relates to basic rights, if a person has the money, they can achieve their ends. With money seen in such a powerful light as something that can 'buy' anything in the legal system, it is easy to develop a belief that justice is no longer unbiased, but negotiable.

Table 3. Roland Barthes’s Semiotic Analysis of Verse 3 of the Song “Bayar Bayar Bayar”

Lyrics: Verse 3	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
<i>Mau korupsi, bayar polisi</i> <i>Mau gusur rumah, bayar polisi</i> <i>Mau babat hutan, bayar polisi</i> <i>Mau jadi polisi, bayar polisi</i>	Addressing serious issues with far-reaching consequences—such as corruption, evictions, and environmental destruction—as well as the process of becoming part of the institution itself.	The practice of “paying bribes” is no longer merely a matter of administrative or legal formalities, but is associated with structural crimes and the violation of public rights, such as corruption, forced evictions, and deforestation.	Power, the law, and access to resources cannot only be bought with money, but also contribute to the moral corruption of certain officials, the erosion of public rights, and systemic failures.

Analyzing the third verse of 'Bayar Bayar Bayar', the lyrics 'Mau korupsi, bayar polisi/Mau gusur rumah, bayar polisi/Mau babat hutan, bayar polisi/Mau jadi polisi, bayar polisi' are the most critical and are probably the reason behind the popularity of the song. Denotatively, these lyrics are serious and wide ranging in subject matter (corruption, property rights, environmental law and joining the institution of the police itself) and are all associated with the action of 'paying'. Connotatively, the practice of 'paying the police' is not confined to administrative tasks or dealings but now relates to official crime and the erosion of public rights. The meaning of 'paying' is then widened to 'money can influence all aspects of the system, it is not confined to simple bribes but affects major systemic crime. The perception is then created that money has to be 'paid' in all circumstances, even the most corrupt and unethical ones.' The song thereby raises the notion that if citizens can be observed 'paying the police' in such grave situations, why can they not do so? The mythologization is evident in the creation of the belief that money can make individuals succeed in all situations, even the illegal and unethical, and if citizens are forced to 'pay' for anything they will accept paying for these too; it is the only means of proceeding.

Table 4. Roland Barthes’s Semiotic Analysis of the Refrain of the Song “Bayar Bayar Bayar”

Lyrics: Ref 1	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
<i>Aduh, aduh, ku tak punya uang Untuk bisa bayar polisi</i>	These lyrics describe the situation of someone who doesn't have the money to “pay,” as repeated throughout the song.	The inability to “have money” is not only understood as an individual economic problem, but also as a symbol of limited access to security, justice, and legal protection.	The belief that money is the primary prerequisite for obtaining justice and fair treatment.

In terms of its denotative level, what is being explained in this part is simply the conditions of someone who has no money for 'pay' as stated in the song. But in terms of its connotative level, 'have no money' no longer refers to mere economic matters of an individual. Instead, 'having no money' refers to lack of access to security, fairness, and legal justice. Such meaning construction makes a large proportion of audiences relate, especially powerless group in society. The last line of chorus then shifts to the phrase of 'be able to pay the police,' which is one of the most central points of the whole song: people 'pay police' because the citizen-authority relation is construed in terms of logic of 'informal payment.' The mythic level of this chorus part re-establishes the claim that money is no longer an 'optional necessity', but the required condition in the discourse to get justice and fair treatment. When it states 'no money' the thing that is shown is not economic problems but a picture of someone who lost his sense of security, legal protection, and even justice.

The critical message becomes more significant because it becomes a source of protest when it gets viral and received numerous negative comments online, which signifies the role of “Bayar Bayar Bayar” lyrics as medium that articulate the public voice of the marginal groups who were disadvantaged by transactional dealings within the society and legal system. In the verse that states the status of being 'no money,' the society is presented as vulnerable, marginalized member and that 'no money' is not an essential thing for receiving fair treatment. This part does not only criticize individuals or certain agents, but system and practice in society. Therefore, 'Bayar Bayar Bayar' is a kind of symbolic resistance that is done in a form of song. And the phenomenon of being viral actually strengthen its critical role and make it part of public discourse on justice, power, and courage to criticize, that it becomes one of the tools for public expression.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the lyrics of the song 'Bayar Bayar Bayar' represent social criticism which is direct, continuous, and touching all the facets of lives of the people involved. It is represented by depicting the repetitive phenomenon of 'paying' on varying situations, starting from a simple matter of bureaucracy, but then extending to law, power, and institutional crimes, where the repeatedness underlines the nature of Transactional Dealing is no longer an incident, but a pattern in citizen-authority relationships which consequently undermines rights and credibility.

Regarding the breadth of the critique contained in this song, the meaning of the lyrics goes beyond literal 'paying', to become 'symbolic meaning'. Applying the semiotics concept of Roland Barthes, the song contains: a denotative part (depicting every day reality), a connotative part (representing fear, Inequality and money-based practices), and a mythic part (reinforcing the assumption of money-based public justice). In this structure, the client/public is shown to be in weak position and the system itself is perceived as being able to let such practice go on.

The meaning contained in the song 'Bayar Bayar Bayar' originates in its being virally spread. The song is not only a piece of music but a media for public communication. It is in digital public spaces that the message is being heard and thus expanding the scope of the song's critique, changing individual feeling into social concern and public discussion is becoming more openness.

These findings confirm that songs lyrics is not just an aesthetic medium but an element of signs capable of meaning at multiple levels, not just on the literal meaning, but also the contextual and ideational meanings. Combining lyric analysis and interview data and the online media observations allows this study to confirm the capacity of song language in representing social reality, constructing critical discourses, and demolishing established myths. Thus, song is an interesting, crucial, and relevant object of study within communication studies and literature studies especially the analysis of the relation between language and power as well as the function of symbolic resistance. In a practical sense, it is a form of social criticism that can be conveyed by simple and contextual lyrics based on collective experience without sacrificing artistic value, reaffirming music as media for public communication capable of fostering a sense of criticalness toward the social and within the space of freedom of expression.

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