



Original Article

Symbolism of Resistance and Alternative Identity in the Song 'Keluarga Babi' by Pyong Pyong

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Abstract:

This study explores the symbolic meanings and representations of alternative identity in the song “*Keluarga Babi*” by the indie pop-punk band Pyong Pyong from Semarang, Indonesia. The song was selected for its articulation of cultural resistance against social domination and power through the medium of music. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach and symbolic analysis, the research examines how the figures of the “pig” (*babi*) and the “wolf” (*srigala*) in the lyrics function as social metaphors. The “pig” symbolizes marginalized groups perceived as inferior but who maintain solidarity, integrity, and courage, while the “wolf” represents corrupt power structures that oppress the people. The analysis draws on Stuart Hall’s theory of identity construction, expressivist aesthetics, and Sartrean existentialism to interpret the values of resistance and the courage to choose an alternative way of life. The findings indicate that the song constitutes a form of collective, symbolic, and existential identity expression that challenges domination and celebrates the bravery of being different. This research contributes to the discourse on independent music as a site for the production of cultural meaning and local political resistance.



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Keywords: Pyong pyong, pop punk, alternative identity, social symbols, resistance, the song “*keluarga babi*”

Introduction

Music functions as a cultural language capable of generating meaning, shaping identity, and articulating social and political experiences. Within the realm of popular culture, music often becomes a medium for ideological expression, especially for marginalized groups and alternative communities seeking to voice their identities outside the dominance of the mainstream. As argued by Hesmondhalgh (2019), popular music serves as a symbolic space in which identity negotiation and political expression unfold, both implicitly and explicitly.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the development of pop punk music, both globally and in Indonesia. Pop punk emerges as a raw, honest form of expression characterized by its

rebellious spirit, frequently used to articulate youth anxiety, critique social structures, and explore personal and collective identity struggles (Bennett, 2020). In Indonesia, the rise of the underground music scene since the late 1990s has fostered the growth of alternative communities and bands that reject the commercial logic of the mainstream music industry. These groups construct their identities through DIY ethics, politically charged lyrics, and performative resistance to institutional norms (Herdiansyah & Novrianti, 2021).

A significant representation of this discourse is Pyong Pyong, a pop punk band from Semarang active since 1999. Known for their expressive style and ideological consistency, Pyong Pyong have remained committed to the spirit of freedom of expression. Their song “*Keluarga Babi*” (The Pig Family) stands as one of their most iconic works, showcasing the symbolic and narrative power of music in constructing alternative identities. In this song, the symbol of the “pig” is employed as a subversive metaphor challenging dominant social norms, while the “wolf” is portrayed as a representation of oppressive authority.

The symbolism in this song functions not merely as artistic ornamentation, but as a representational strategy that constructs meaning and shapes identity affiliation (Darmawan, 2023; Hebdige, 1979). The symbols of “pig” and “wolf” in “*Keluarga Babi*” can be interpreted as narrative representations of the conflict between hegemonic power and oppressed collective identities. In this context, it is crucial to examine how these representations construct culturally produced alternative identities, and how music serves as an existential medium for articulating life choices that diverge from the mainstream.

Stuart Hall (1996) posits that identity is the product of dynamic, discursive processes of representation rather than an essentialist concept. Through music, identity is constructed, negotiated, and communicated via symbols, lyrics, and other artistic expressions. This study also engages with the expressive aesthetics approach, wherein artworks are regarded as channels for the creator’s emotions and ideas (Yusro & Nurhadi, 2022), and with Sartrean existentialism, which views human beings as free agents responsible for the meanings they create in their lives (Sartre, 1943).

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the use of social symbols and the representation of identity in Pyong Pyong’s “*Keluarga Babi*.” It focuses on how the symbols of the “pig” and “wolf” are mobilized to voice alternative identities and resistance to social domination. This research further seeks to demonstrate how indie music functions as a significant site for meaning-making and cultural-political discourse production at the local level.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretive design, aimed at understanding the symbolic meanings and identity narratives embedded in the lyrics of “*Keluarga Babi*” by the pop punk band Pyong Pyong. This approach was selected due to the nature of the research object—song lyrics—as a cultural text rich in symbolic, ideological, and representational meaning. In line with Creswell (2014), the qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore complex, context-dependent meanings, particularly in cultural phenomena that cannot be quantified.

The descriptive-interpretive design is utilized to both describe and interpret the social symbols present in the song lyrics. This design does not merely focus on what is presented in the text, but also interrogates how the text represents social meaning, collective identity, and resistance to dominant power structures. Within this approach, researcher subjectivity is not avoided; rather, it is consciously managed as a central interpretive instrument (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2018).

The object of this research is the song lyrics of “Keluarga Babi,” selected through purposive sampling. The song was chosen for its strong use of social symbolism and its articulation of alternative identity through animal representations (the pig and the wolf) within a context of cultural resistance. Furthermore, the song is one of the most iconic works in Pyong Pyong’s discography and fully embodies the independent music ideology the band has upheld since its inception.

Data for this study were collected using multiple techniques: (1) documentation of the song lyrics as primary data; (2) audio-visual observation of live performances and video recordings of Pyong Pyong to capture musical expression, performative gestures, and collective atmospheres; (3) interviews with band members; and (4) digital tracking of public interviews, social media content, and official band statements relevant to the song’s symbolic meaning.

The data analysis employed symbolic and interpretive analysis. In this technique, the symbols found in the lyrics are interpreted based on the social constructions and collective experiences surrounding them. The interpretation is guided by three main theoretical frameworks:

- a) Stuart Hall’s Theory of Representation (1997), which is used to understand how the symbols of the “pig” and the “wolf” represent specific social identities within power relations. Representation is understood not as a mere reflection of reality, but as a cultural process of meaning-making.
- b) Tolstoy’s Expressivist Aesthetic Theory (1995), which helps analyze how music and lyrics function as mediums for conveying emotions and ideas. The song is seen as a form of affective communication that articulates the collective inner voice of a community.
- c) Sartre’s Existentialist Philosophy (1943), which is applied to uncover the existential significance behind the chosen identity of the “pig” as a form of individual or collective courage in consciously and freely defining one’s life amidst social pressure.

The analysis process involved three stages:

- a) identifying key symbols and the narrative structure of the lyrics;
- b) interpreting the symbolic meanings in relation to the band’s socio-cultural context and public reception; and
- c) triangulating interpretations with visual observation data and interview documentation. Informal member checking was conducted by comparing previous interview data and community responses to the song on social media platforms.

To ensure the credibility and qualitative validity of the findings, this research applied Geertz’s (1973) concept of “thick description,” which emphasizes rich contextual detail, and employed researcher reflexivity to account for the subjective position in meaning construction. Thus, the interpretations offered are not presented as absolute, but as academically grounded and open to reinterpretation.

Through this methodological approach, the study positions the song not merely as an aesthetic artifact, but as a social and political text, one that represents resistance, identity, and existential meaning through cultural symbols.

Results and Discussion

The Symbol of the “Pig” as an Alternative and Collective Identity

The symbol of the “pig” in the song *Keluarga Babi* appears as a counter-representation to the hegemonic meanings commonly found in Indonesian society. Within dominant social norms, the “pig” is a symbol of insult, excluded from the public sphere, and used as a metaphor for

impurity or moral corruption. Pyong Pyong, in their pop punk subcultural position, consciously adopts this symbol as an emblem of identity. This act is a form of resignification, i.e., reloading the symbol with values contrary to its original meaning, as articulated by Hebdige (1979).

More than just a symbol of shock or rebellion, the “pig” in this song is collectively interpreted as a family: a community that supports each other in equality. The lyrics “Kami adalah keluarga babi / Sambut pagi dengan bernyanyi dan menari” (“We are the pig family / Welcoming the morning with singing and dancing”) reflect gratitude, joy, and resistance to stigma. This indicates that the symbol of the “pig” is shaped through a discursive and dynamic process—not as a biological entity, but as a cultural symbol produced by a community that rejects dominant hegemony (Hall, 1996).

The identity in this song is not personal but collective. They are not “I” but “we.” The word “family” shows that resistance to dominant meaning structures is carried out together, reinforcing one another, and unafraid of social marginalization. In research by Santos (2022), it was found that punk communities in Southeast Asia frequently use the language of family to create emotional solidarity, especially for individuals marginalized from biological families or formal institutions.

The symbol of the “pig” can also be understood within Sartrean existentialist framework, as a conscious act to become something despised by society but meaningful in personal experience. Sartre (1943) stated that humans are free to determine their essence. In this case, Pyong Pyong demonstrates the freedom to choose to become the “pig,” not out of ignorance, but out of the desire to redefine the meaning of “pig” itself into a symbol of courage and solidarity.

This symbolic choice is not without risk. In a still-conservative society, calling oneself a “pig” is a high-risk act that could invite condemnation. However, in punk music, the courage to appear different is a foundational principle. As Bennett (2020) explained, punk music is an arena where extreme expression is used to disrupt the stability of dominant meanings and compel listeners to reflect on their social assumptions.

From the perspective of expressive aesthetics, the use of the “pig” symbol is not merely a social critique but also an affective expression. The lyrics, fast tempo, and raw vocal style form an emotional unity that shows this song is not only to be heard, but to be felt. Yusro & Nurhadi (2022) noted that in local indie music, emotion becomes the main medium to convey meaning more deeply than logical argumentation.

Moreover, in literary and artistic traditions, animal symbols are often used to convey moral messages or social satire. However, unlike fables, in this song, the animals are not allegorical representations of specific characters, but become the identity itself. “Kami adalah keluarga babi” (“We are the pig family”) is not merely a metaphor, but a direct identity statement, demonstrating the extent to which the symbol has been internalized.

Munandar’s (2023) research showed that the use of animal symbols in Indonesian punk music is a form of resistance to social labeling. In lyrics that emerge from a marginal position, these symbols are not portrayed as victims but as active agents proud of their position. In other words, Pyong Pyong does not pity themselves as “pigs,” but celebrates the new meaning they have constructed from the symbol.

In its performative aspect, the use of this symbol is not only present in lyrics but also in stage performance, posters, and merchandise. By spreading the visualization of the “pig” as the band's symbol, Pyong Pyong engages in a form of consistent articulation between narrative and visual. This reinforces the constructed meaning while expanding the political reach of the symbol into a wider public space.

The song also contains a narrative of empowerment. The phrase “tak pernah mengenal arti kata takut” (“never knew the meaning of fear”) indicates that the symbol of the “pig” is not one of surrender, but of determination. In terms of cultural resistance theory, this is a form of counter-hegemonic discourse, that is, reversing symbolic power by creating a narrative that balances the position of marginalized groups ([Darmawan, 2023](#)).

The Symbol of the “Wolf” as a Representation of Repressive Power

If the “pig” is the identity celebrated, then the “wolf” is the power confronted. The symbol of the “wolf” appears repeatedly in the song, explicitly described as “big and bad.” This is a visualization of collective fear: a strong, dangerous, and unjust entity. In Ramadhani’s (2021) study, symbols of wild animals like the “wolf” are often used in protest songs to represent oppressive systems of power without naming them directly.

The “wolf” in this song represents the state, institutions, or corrupt authority figures. However, this symbol is also open-ended, allowing lyric readers to fill it with their own experiences of power. This is the strength of open symbols in music: they are not final but dialogical. [Hall \(1997\)](#) calls this the practice of encoding/decoding in which both the producer and the receiver of messages are involved in meaning-making.

Pyong Pyong positions the “wolf” as the antithesis of the “pig family.” Thus, the song creates a dualistic structure that emphasizes a moral and social struggle between two positions: the oppressor and the oppressed. This symbol becomes a meeting point between personal experience and larger social structures, as described by Pereira (2019) in the context of protest songs in Latin America.

The repetition of the phrase “Kami tak takut srigala...” (“We are not afraid of the wolf...”) serves as both emotional and political resistance. In expressive aesthetics, repetition is a technique to enhance emotional effect and transform lyrics into a mantra of resistance. This is supported by McKay’s (2021) research, which found that repetitive structures in protest music serve to strengthen collective solidarity.

Musically, the contrast between the frightening “wolf” and the joyful “pig” shows how Pyong Pyong builds a sonic narrative of social opposition. The tension between symbols is embodied in musical dynamics: fast tempo, minor chord progressions, and emotional vocals. Music does not merely accompany lyrics but becomes part of the narrative itself.

Within the framework of cultural representation, the “wolf” symbol is a tool for deconstructing official state or institutional narratives. This song invites listeners to re-examine who has long been considered legitimate and powerful. In this way, Pyong Pyong urges listeners to engage in critical consciousness, as described by Paulo Freire, an awareness of social structures.

The Song as an Expression of Resistance and Alternative Identity

Keluarga Babi can be read not only as a piece of popular music in the pop punk genre, but also as a form of complex social articulation. The song effectively conveys symbolic and emotional resistance to power while constructing a strong alternative identity outside the dominant societal narrative.

As a cultural expression, the song shows that Pyong Pyong uses music as a space for meaning-making that challenges the status quo. Through the symbol of the “pig,” they celebrate

togetherness, courage, and solidarity from a marginalized position. The identity they build is collective but also existential: they choose to define their lives and social position differently. This strongly resonates with Sartre's (1943) idea that human freedom lies in the ability to choose and create meaning in an absurd and oppressive world.

Musically, the song also reinforces its ideological content through fast tempo, lyrical repetition, and expressive vocal style. From the perspective of expressive aesthetics, this proves that music is an expression of emotions and ideas that is not bound by formal beauty, but instead derives value from its authenticity and intensity (Tolstoy, 1995). Pyong Pyong does not present music merely to be heard, but to be felt, reflected upon, and perhaps even emulated.

From Stuart Hall's (1996) framework of representation, the song also demonstrates how identity is constructed through difference. The "pig family" is defined precisely in opposition to the "wolf." They become who they are because they are not power, not oppressors, not part of a corrupt social structure. Here lies the crucial function of symbols: to differentiate, to construct opposition, and to reinforce the social and cultural position of a group.

Therefore, Keluarga Babi is a statement that is not only aesthetic but also ideological and philosophical. It is not merely alternative entertainment, but also a political articulation of a group that chooses not to conform. Amid the dominance of a commercial and homogeneous music industry, this work serves as a reminder that music can remain a tool for the struggle of identity and the courage to be different.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Keluarga Babi by Pyong Pyong is not merely an ordinary musical work, but a powerful space of symbolic articulation that represents alternative identities and a spirit of resistance against social domination. Through symbolic analysis, expressive aesthetics, and an existentialist framework, the song can be read as a cultural text that challenges dominant meanings in Indonesian society.

The symbol of the "pig," which has long been reduced to a despicable and disgusting creature, is re-signified in this song as a symbol of solidarity, courage, and collective joy. This use of symbolism reveals that alternative identities can be constructed from the margins, spaces often overlooked and devalued. Pyong Pyong does not only interpret the "pig" as an act of resistance, but also as an existential affirmation of their life choices as an independent band committed to a non-commercial path.

In contrast, the symbol of the "wolf" is presented as a representation of corrupt, dominant, and oppressive power. This figure is not merely a metaphorical animal but symbolizes systems of authority that often destroy the lives of small, marginalized groups. The lyrics rejecting fear of the "wolf" become a form of collective affect that voices resistance to such structures of domination.

The findings of this study suggest that music can serve as an effective tool for meaning-making among subcultural groups, to construct their identities, create existential spaces, and engage in symbolic and political resistance. In the context of Indonesian culture, this song also contributes to the narrative that punk music is not solely about rebellion, but also a medium for rethinking life's meaning, free choices, and intellectual freedom.

Through its lyrical narrative, symbolism, vocal style, and the band's cultural practices, Pyong Pyong offers an alternative world in which the "pig" becomes a symbol of love and family, and the "wolf" a shared enemy to be confronted without fear. Their courage to continue creating outside the currents of the music industry shows that existential values, artistic honesty, and

solidarity can still be preserved in a world increasingly driven by commercialism. This research also indirectly illustrates that the study of popular music cannot be separated from cultural, ideological, and political analysis. Music is not merely entertainment; it is a text that can be read, interpreted, and even used as a tool to deconstruct social meaning structures.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope to include other works by Pyong Pyong or other Indonesian indie bands that employ social symbolism in their lyrics. Additionally, other approaches, such as musical ethnography, performance studies, or discourse theory, could be employed to deepen the analysis of cultural practices and identity in Indonesia's underground music scene.

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