



Original Article

Semiotic Analysis of the Song Kawanen Saur Composed by the Musical Group Jepang Jowo

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the lyrics of the song "Kawanen Saur" using a Peircean semiotic approach, focusing on understanding the signs contained in the lyrics and how these lyrics reflect the life experiences and cultural values of Indonesian society, especially during the month of Ramadan. The results of the analysis show that the lyrics of this song describe a person's concrete experience, especially the difficulty of waking up in the morning, through a combination of representamen, objects, and interpretants that produce a deep understanding of the behavior and situations experienced by the individual. The lyrics also describe the struggle between physical needs, social norms, and religious morality, by showing the internal conflict that arises due to the difference between desires and applicable rules. In addition, this analysis reveals that the lyrics function as a representation of Indonesian culture, by describing the experience of breaking the fast and conveying a profound moral message. Through the elements of representamen, objects, and interpretants, a humorous and reflective meaning is created that not only provides entertainment but also reflects a culture rich in spiritual and social values. In conclusion, the lyrics of the song "Kawanen Saur" not only represent a personal story, but also describe collective values in society, as well as showing the spirit of hard work and the hope for spiritual rewards through dedication and devotion.

Keywords: semiotics, charles sanders pierce, song lyrics

Introduction

Music is a profound expression of the heart and emotions, conveyed through the combination of sound, rhythm, and melody, intentionally designed to create harmonious beauty. As an art form, music serves as a medium for both emotional and intellectual expression, while also functioning as a reflection of the culture and values of the society in which it develops. Each musical composition carries messages that represent particular norms and values, which may be communicated explicitly or implicitly—either



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through formal contexts such as official compositions, or through informal forms such as traditional music passed down from generation to generation ([Julia, 2017](#)).

According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), music is defined as a branch of science or art concerned with the arrangement and composition of tones or sounds. This process involves the integration of various sound elements organized within a specific temporal relationship to produce a structured, balanced, and harmonious composition. Music encompasses elements such as song, rhythm, and harmony, which are often employed to articulate or express something. In other words, music is an artistic expression that unites diverse sonic elements to create works of aesthetic and emotional significance ([Sultan, 1994](#)).

The Oxford Encyclopedia defines music as an art form comprising key elements such as rhythm, melody, and harmony, combined to produce sound and instrumental performance that conveys deep meaning intended by its creator. Musical art represents one manifestation of human creativity, in which an individual's feelings and inner thoughts are expressed through sounds or tones arranged in an orderly fashion, possessing rhythmic patterns, beautiful melodies, and integrated harmonization. Music has the power to evoke emotions and touch the soul of its listeners. It can also be understood as the beauty of an arrangement of tones that offers an aesthetic experience and sensory satisfaction to the human ear. Not all forms of sound can be categorized as musical art or vocal art; such classification applies only to sounds that meet specific aesthetic criteria, including beauty, pleasantness, and harmony. These sounds are defined as those with frequencies within the human hearing range, thus enabling them to be received and appreciated as possessing artistic value. Consequently, not every sound produced qualifies as musical art, but only those fulfilling the requirements of tonal beauty and order ([Wisnawa, 2020](#)).

According to M. Soeharto, music can be interpreted as a form of expression emerging from human emotions or feelings, which are then channeled through the medium of sound. When such expression is realized through the human voice, it takes the form of song; when conveyed through musical instruments, it becomes instrumental sound. In essence, music is the result of a fusion between creativity and emotion, embodied in various types of sound, whether through human vocals or instruments. Music can be classified into various categories based on its type and characteristics. Broadly, these include popular music, classical music, and traditional music. In its broadest sense, traditional music refers to music that develops within a particular community and is transmitted across generations. It generally reflects the culture, values, and traditions of its origin. Popular music, in contrast, is often regarded as part of contemporary music due to its distinctive characteristics that keep it relevant and recognizable across different eras, despite its tendency to follow prevailing trends. Popular music genres worldwide include grunge, reggae, rap, rock 'n' roll, swing, dangdut, and punk heavy metal, each possessing its own unique traits and audience.

Without the element of poetry, music can essentially be referred to as a song, comprising a series of tones arranged in a particular order but without a deep meaning or specific purpose intended by the composer. To enhance its meaning, composers often add lyrics, providing words that clarify or deepen the intended message. As a medium, music is highly flexible in both form and mode of delivery, and it is readily accepted by the general public. Thus, music is not merely a source of entertainment but also an effective means of conveying messages or expressions, wherein various sounds or melodies are arranged into a unified, harmonious, and coherent whole capable of

moving the emotions or influencing its audience ([Soeharto, 1992](#)).

A song is a form of artistic work composed of a sequence of harmoniously arranged tones, accompanied by a compatible rhythm, and enriched with lyrics that together create a captivating unity of harmony. As a musical creation, a song often serves as a highly effective medium for conveying messages or information to its listeners. This is due to its unique capacity to touch and evoke emotions, capturing a wide range of feelings such as hope, desire, joy, and even extreme emotions such as madness. Consequently, songs have become one of the most favored and popular forms of communication in society, particularly among younger generations. Through a song, an individual not only hears melodies and rhythms but also experiences, understands, and contemplates the meaning embedded within its lyrics. Song lyrics frequently contain profound messages intended by the composer for listeners, encompassing expressions of emotion, thought, or personal worldview. In this context, language functions as the primary tool for conveying the songwriter's intentions to the public, making it a powerful medium for articulating diverse ideas and sentiments ([Octaviani & Nurfauziah, 2023](#)).

A song can fundamentally be regarded as a form of literary work, sharing similarities with poetry, but distinguished by the fact that it is meant to be sung. Within this framework, songwriters craft and shape their musical works through the deliberate selection of words. Lyrics are not merely ordinary sequences of words; they are meaningful self-expressions in which each term is purposefully chosen to communicate a particular message to the audience. Through creative language use, song lyrics evoke profound appeal, stimulate emotions and imagination, and leave a lasting emotional impact on those who hear them. When these words are combined with melody and musical arrangement, the conveyed message becomes more effective and accessible, positioning the song as a potent medium for communication and emotional engagement (Banoe, 2004).

Poetic elements are often present in song lyrics, as both poetry and lyrics are essentially sequences of words imbued with meaning intended by the author for the audience. Aristotle classified song within the realm of literary arts, asserting that poetry is more intellectual than history ([Hendrik, 2008](#)). From his perspective, literature is not merely narrative but also a representation of empirical reality, reflecting imitation—mimesis—of the world of ideas. Similarly, songs frequently contain deeper meanings and purposes, offering the potential to convey significant social messages. Beyond entertainment, music in the form of song also functions as a medium for imparting social knowledge and critique, addressing societal phenomena and enabling individuals to better understand the world in which they live ([Dwi, 2009](#)).

Every song carries a message intended by its creator for the listener. This message is communicated through signs that hold specific meanings. Semiotics, the study of signs, examines how these signs reveal meaning and representation. Signs are not limited to language but encompass various aspects of life, including experiences, thoughts, emotions, and ideas. While language represents the most complex and comprehensive system of signs, it is not the only means of conveying meaning ([Piliang, 2012](#)).

Preliminary analysis of the lyrics of Kawanen Saur reveals an integration of local and universal elements that reflect specific social realities. This serves as the foundation for further exploration of the symbolic meanings embedded in the song. Accordingly, this research aims not only to contribute to the academic discourse on semiotics but also to expand understanding of the significance of preserving local culture through artistic

media, particularly music.

In light of this phenomenon, the present study seeks to uncover the semiotic meanings in the song Kawanen Saur through the theoretical framework of Charles Sanders Peirce, and to elucidate how the song represents the socio-cultural phenomenon of Ramadan through its employed symbols.

Methods

Qualitative research is an approach that emphasizes understanding phenomena through detailed description and narrative presentation of findings. Characterized by its descriptive, narrative, and holistic nature, this method seeks to grasp the overall context of the phenomenon rather than focusing on isolated aspects. Its flexibility allows researchers to interpret data freely, uncovering the meanings and processes inherent in the subject of study. This approach is iterative, involving ongoing data collection, analysis, and reflection, and values diverse perspectives that enrich the research outcomes. Commonly, data are obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, followed by a systematic process of data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to achieve an in-depth and comprehensive [understanding \(Warumu, 2024\)](#). The present study focuses on Jepang Jowo, a music project initiated by Hendra Kumbara and Selagood around 2015, which was later revived in 2019 after a period of hiatus. One of their notable works is the song Kawanen Sahur, co-written by the founders, which gained viral popularity on social media. The collaboration also involved Dimex, drummer of Serempet Gudal, and the trio frequently gathered informally, exchanging ideas and humor until they formulated the concept they called “Jepang Jawa.” Their works are now accessible via streaming platforms such as Spotify. Data collection in this study relied on two primary techniques: non-participant observation and documentation. In the observation process, the researcher acted solely as an observer, focusing on song lyrics without direct engagement in the group’s activities or social interactions. Documentation encompassed the gathering and utilization of various records of past events, including written texts such as diaries, biographies, and regulations; visual materials such as photographs and sketches; and artistic works such as paintings, films, poems, and songs. The procedure involved compiling all singles, albums, and cover artworks produced by Jepang Jowo, selecting specific lyrics for in-depth analysis, and examining them to uncover the embedded messages and cultural values. Through the integration of these methods, the study aims to generate a rich, nuanced understanding of the symbolic meanings within Jepang Jowo’s works while situating them within their broader socio-cultural context.

Results

Semiotics is a branch of science that studies signs or symbols used in communication, essentially understood as representations or indicators of something larger or deeper. This discipline focuses on analyzing how these signs function to convey information and meaning tied to a particular context. Semiotics not only examines objects or phenomena marked by symbols but also studies how society creates and uses these signs in the process of interaction and communication. Therefore, semiotics is closely related to the concept of meaning—how something can be understood or interpreted—and communication, which refers to the channels or media through which that meaning is transmitted, received, and understood by individuals or groups within a community. In this regard, semiotics plays an important role in revealing the ways in

which society constructs, distributes, and interprets information, as well as its influence on collective understanding ([Umaya Maharani & Ambarini, 2012](#)).

The main goal of semiotics is to identify and explore the various meanings contained in existing signs, as well as to interpret and understand those meanings in depth. This enables us to more clearly understand how different media play a role in constructing the messages being delivered. Semiotics itself consists of three main interrelated components: first, the sign itself, which invites one to study the various types of signs that exist in different communication contexts; second, the code or system that functions to organize, label, and structure these signs; and third, the culture in which the code and signs operate, which greatly influences the form, interpretation, and existence of the signs and codes used in a community or society. These signs and codes are not limited to their physical form but are also closely tied to the cultural context that shapes the meaning contained within them ([Trabaut Jorgen & Pattinasarany, 1996](#)).

Semiotics is a branch of science that focuses on the study of signs and the ways we understand the meaning contained within them. These signs can take the form of symbols, words, images, or even behaviors, which have the ability to convey certain information or messages. In daily life, we often encounter various types of signs that we sometimes understand, yet often do not fully realize or comprehend. These signs may come from interactions between humans, communication with animals, or even natural phenomena that give us clues or deeper meanings. Semiotics seeks to uncover how each sign functions and provides insight into how we interpret the world around us.

Charles S. Peirce, known for his theory of the meaning triangle, proposed that there are three main components that form meaning in a sign: the sign itself, the object referred to by the sign, and the interpretant that emerges as a result of the interaction between the sign and the object. In Peirce's view, a physical object that can be recognized by the senses and has a connection or represents something other than the sign itself is called a sign. Peirce classified signs into three types: index, a sign that appears based on a direct relationship with the referred object; icon, a sign that imitates or physically represents the object; and symbol, a sign formed based on social agreement regarding a cause-and-effect relationship. The object that serves as the reference or referent of the sign is called the object. In this theory, the social environment plays an important role in determining how a sign is understood, as the understanding of a sign is greatly influenced by the social and cultural context surrounding the individual or group interpreting it.

The idea possessed by an interpreter—or a person who uses a sign—is that of an individual who utilizes a sign in daily life and then processes and filters the meaning contained within that sign. This process involves interpretation or comprehension of the meaning in the mind of the sign user, which is then directly related to the specific context being faced. The way meaning emerges from a sign, especially when it is used for communication, is one of the most important and fundamental aspects of the semiotic process. In this case, how meaning is formed and understood by individuals becomes a key element that enables communication among humans and influences how we understand the world through the signs around us.

According to Charles Peirce, the phenomenon of sound symbolism reveals an unconscious tendency in the creation of signs. These signs, whether verbal or non-verbal, tend to imitate the concept or object they represent. In general, signs are divided into two categories: first, symbols, which explain a particular meaning directly or indirectly; and second, signals, which convey a specific intention. Consequently, each sign has a

direct connection with its object based on convention, making the interpretation uniform. These signs directly reveal reality ([Liliweri, 2003](#)).

--lirik lagu Kawanen Saur--
 Mau bengi aku angel tangi
 Turu tanek koyok mati suri
 Mbok gugah, aku wegah
 Mbok idak, aku mencak
 Ameh sahur jam telu Malah tangi jam pitu

Isuke aku wis ngroso ngeleh
 Pngen mangan soto Ngombe esteh
 Meh poso iseh dowo
 Meh mokah, wedi duso
 Ameh turu sedino ndak yo rak popo?

Maghribé jik sue
 Lagek njedul srengenge
 Kolak mendoane kok wis ngawe ngawe
 Bukone jik mengko
 Semangat ojo ngendo
 Ndelok kebak jumbo, kok jebul kanebo

Goro goro aku lembur
 Dadine kawanen saur
 Mugo-mugo pahalane ora kabur

Representamen

Representamen refers to something that represents a particular object ([Gerung, Meruntu, and Senduk, 2023](#)). In this context, the representamen, or representation—often referred to as a sign—can appear in various forms, whether verbal or visual, as clearly seen in song lyrics. An object or entity that functions as this sign is referred to as the sign or the representation itself. Therefore, it can be concluded that to interpret a sign or representation, one must first understand its context or interpreter. This aims to help readers or observers better comprehend how the sound components in music play a role in shaping meaning within the song lyrics.

Three important components that make up the scope of representation are Qualisign, Sinsign, and Legisign. Qualisign refers to a sign that appears spontaneously and individually, which can be analyzed based on its characteristics or qualities. For example, words in song lyrics that produce various kinds of sounds—such as melodic, soft, loud, harsh, or gentle—can be classified as Qualisigns. Sinsign, on the other hand, is a sign that arises from cause-and-effect relationships and personal experience, whose qualities are highly dependent on a particular context or situation. For instance, sarcasm or implied meaning in a verse can be understood through our knowledge and experience of its context. Lastly, Legisign is a type of sign that has been agreed upon or regulated by certain norms or rules. For example, someone might interpret song lyrics describing a calm and happy mood as actually containing satire, reflecting social norms or agreements about the meaning within those lyrics.

In the song Kawanen Saur, Qualisign refers to qualities or characteristics that are part of the sign. In these lyrics, the Qualisign appears in words such as "angel tangi" (hard to wake up) and "turu tanek koyok mati suri" (sleeping deeply like in a coma).

These words illustrate the qualities of laziness, drowsiness, or fatigue. The word "ngeleh" (hungry) conveys a quality representing a common physical state when someone needs food. In these lyrics, the Qualisign is also evident in the humorous and relaxed tone, as in "kok wis ngawe-ngawe" and "kok jebul kanebo". This linguistic style reflects light sarcasm and depicts a casual atmosphere before breaking the fast. The Qualisign can also include a distinctive melody or rhythm used to sing this song, which evokes a sense of hard work and prayer. Sinsign is a sign that appears as a specific or concrete event.

The lyric "Ameh sahur jam telu, malah tangi jam pitu" is a Sinsign because it describes a specific incident: someone failing to wake up on time for sahur and only waking at seven. The lyric "Pengan mangan soto ngombe esteh" describes a specific real-life situation, expressing the desire to eat soto and drink iced tea as a response to hunger. The text depicts a typical atmosphere before breaking the fast (maghrib), such as "Maghribe jek suwe, lagek njedul srengenge" describing the feeling of a long wait for sunset. "Kolak mendoane kok wis ngawe-ngawe" portrays the common experience of waiting for iftar dishes. These show real situational contexts. The lyric "Goro-goro aku lembur" represents the specific situation of someone working overtime, making it an example of a Sinsign.

Legisign is a sign that is conventional and universally recognized. The phrase "mbok gugah, aku wegah" (wake me up, I'm reluctant) depicts a common habit or behavior—reluctance to get up when woken—that is socially understood as laziness. The lyric "Meh poso, iseh dowo" refers to Islamic religious conventions governing fasting, while "Meh mokah, wedi duso" represents the moral rule that breaking the fast is considered sinful. In this context, the entire lyrics follow Indonesian cultural norms during Ramadan, such as preparing kolak or mendoan for iftar. Overall, the lyrics reflect Javanese cultural values of hard work and the hope for spiritual rewards, which are normative values recognized by society.

Object

An object can be understood as something referred to or denoted by a sign in a semiotic system ([Kumala, 2024](#)). In this context, the object refers to the element or entity represented or symbolized by the sign, which exists even though it is distinct from the sign itself. Thus, the object can be considered part of the secondary process of representation that occurs in symbolic communication. In sign theory, signs are categorized into three main types based on their relationship to the objects they represent: Icon, Index, and Symbol.

An Icon is a sign whose relationship between signifier and signified is determined by a natural resemblance in form or characteristics. In other words, an icon has an actual similarity between the sign's form and the object it represents. An Index, on the other hand, is a sign that indicates a cause-and-effect relationship or a more complex connection between the sign and its object. For example, smoke can be an index of fire due to their causal relationship. Finally, a Symbol is a sign whose meaning is not determined by any natural resemblance or direct connection to the object it represents but instead is based on social convention. A symbol can only be understood through the conventions or customs of a particular culture or communication system.

In the song Kawanen Saur, an Icon is a sign that resembles its object. The depiction "turu tanek koyok mati suri" is an icon because it metaphorically represents a deep sleep similar to a coma (loss of consciousness). The lyric "Ameh turu sedino ndakyo rakpopo" is an icon of laziness, where "turu" (sleep) is associated with long, inactive rest.

In these lyrics, "lagek njedul srengenge" and "kolak mendoane" are icons that directly depict real visual and culinary situations. The word "goro-goro" (meaning bustle or commotion) can be considered an icon because it vividly describes a busy atmosphere.

An Index is a sign that has a cause-and-effect relationship with its object. The phrase "ameh sahur jam telu, malah tangi jam pitu" is an index showing the direct relationship between laziness (cause) and waking late for sahur (effect). The lyric "Aku wis kroso ngeleh" is an index of a physical condition caused by not eating or lacking energy. Likewise, "Maghribe jek suwe" is an index of the time before breaking the fast, which naturally feels longer because of hunger. "Kolak mendoane kok wis ngawe-ngawe" is an index of the habit and culture of breaking the fast in Indonesia. The lyric "aku lembur" is an index that work is unfinished, requiring extra effort at night.

A Symbol is a sign whose relationship with its object is based on agreement or convention. The word "sahur" is a symbol meaning the pre-dawn meal before fasting in Islamic tradition—its meaning is culturally agreed upon. The lyric "Meh mokah, wedi duso" is a symbol of Islamic teachings, where "duso" (sin) is a symbolic concept of violating religious norms. The term "kanebo" here is a humorous symbol representing something disappointing (a dishcloth instead of a kebab). "Semangat ojo ngendo" is a symbol of motivation, associated with values of patience and self-control during fasting. The lyric "Mugo-mugo pahalane ora kabur" is a symbol of hope and prayer, reflecting the religious beliefs or spiritual values of Javanese society.

Interpretant

Interpretant refers to the understanding a subject has of a sign, as explained by [Rahim \(2024\)](#). This concept can be understood as the result of the internalization of a sign in our minds, occurring through our interaction with the sign. In other words, the interpretant refers to an entity or concept that refers to a particular object and represents a continuation of the initial sign. This process involves a triadic relationship—a direct connection between the interpreter, the object being referred to, and the sign functioning as representation. In short, the interpretant can be understood as the effort to interpret or make meaning of the existence of the first sign that appears.

In the song Kawanen Saur, Rheme is a sign that conveys possibility or uncertain meaning. The phrase "turu tanek koyok mati suri" is a Rheme because it describes the experience of deep sleep but does not explain its exact cause (whether from fatigue, laziness, or something else). The lyric "Pengan mangan soto ngombe esteh" can be interpreted as a simple desire that may or may not be fulfilled, allowing for the interpretation that hunger is only being verbally expressed. In this context, possible meanings include the collective experience of the community during iftar, feelings of hunger, and humor in such situations. The lyric "Mugo-mugo pahalane ora kabur" is a Rheme because it expresses hope that rewards will not be lost.

Dicisign is a sign that conveys a statement or fact. The phrase "ameh sahur jam telu, malah tangi jam pitu" is a Dicisign because it states the fact that someone woke up late and missed sahur. The lyric "Meh poso, iseh dowo" gives information that fasting has not yet begun, allowing time to eat beforehand. These lyrics factually depict situations commonly experienced during Ramadan, such as waiting for maghrib and preparing iftar. The lyric "Goro-goro aku lembur" is also a Dicisign because it states the fact that someone is working hard.

Argument is a sign that conveys a conclusion or logical reasoning. The overall

lyrics can be interpreted as an Argument showing that laziness or difficulty waking up has consequences (in this case, missing sahur). The lyric "Meh mokah, wedi duso" implies moral awareness that restrains the person from committing an act considered sinful in religion, showing the influence of norms on decision-making. This lyric conveys a moral message: patience and enthusiasm in carrying out fasting. The phrase "Semangat ojo ngendo" shows that even though waiting for maghrib feels long, it is important to remain spirited. Overall, the lyrics can be understood as an Argument suggesting that hard work and sacrifice in this world will result in rewards in the hereafter if done with sincere intent.

Conclusion

The semiotic analysis of "Kawanen Saur" using Peirce's framework reveals that the lyrics vividly portray real-life experiences, particularly the struggle to wake up early. Through signs reflecting deep sleep, reluctance, and the consequences of lateness, the interplay of representamen, object, and interpretant offers insight into everyday behavior and situations. Beyond artistic expression, the lyrics mirror relatable daily realities. They also depict the tension between physical needs, social norms, and religious morality. Everyday symbols—such as hunger and eating soto—gain contextual meaning within Indonesian culture, illustrating internal conflict between desire and rules. This reflects the complexity of daily life in society. Furthermore, the lyrics serve as a cultural representation of Indonesian Ramadan traditions, blending humor and reflection to convey moral messages. The combination of words, rhythm, and cultural context expresses hope, devotion, and the belief that hard work and dedication bring spiritual reward. Ultimately, "Kawanen Saur" tells a personal story while embodying collective values.

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