



Article info:

Received:
15 May 2026
Reviewed:
31 May 2026
Accepted:
15 June 2026

*Corresponding author: Akbar Bagaskara, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

E-mail:
akbarbagas65@gmail.com

Popular Music as Social Critique: Class Representation in “Singkong dan Keju” by Bill & Brod

Akbar Bagaskara^{1*}, Tri Wahyu Widodo² Nafisah Aini³, Wahyu Pratama⁴, Ayu Primarini⁵

¹Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

^{2,3}Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Lambung Mangkurat, Balikpapan, Indonesia

⁵China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing, China

Abstract: This study examines the symbolic meaning and social critique contained in the song “*Singkong dan Keju*,” popularized by the Indonesian band Bill & Brod, using Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory. The aim of this study is to analyze how the song’s lyrics represent social class inequality, consumerism, and cultural identity in Indonesian society, particularly during the 1980s, as well as their relevance to contemporary social conditions. This study employs a qualitative method with an analysis adapted from Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic theory. In its stages, I utilize four phases of analysis: naive understanding, symbolic interpretation, distancing, and philosophical reflection. The findings indicate that the symbolic opposition between cassava and cheese, *jaipong* and disco, as well as local and global cultures, reflects social stratification, economic disparities, and the influence of global consumerist thought. Furthermore, this song depicts the marginalization experienced by the lower class while simultaneously critiquing the consumerist lifestyle of the bourgeoisie. This study also found that the song remains relevant in understanding contemporary phenomena such as flexing on social media, symbolic consumption, and the construction of social identity. Therefore, this study contributes to the fields of popular music studies, the sociology of music, and cultural studies by highlighting the role of music in reflecting social interactions and offering a profound critique of Indonesian society’s lifestyle.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, social class, music, symbolic meaning, social critique

1. INTRODUCTION

In many contexts, art—particularly music—serves as an alternative medium capable of conveying the deepest meanings through symbols, metaphors, and aesthetic expressions (Fadhilah, 2019; Surya Permana, 2022). Songs, as a form of musical expression, often function not only as entertainment but also as a medium for social reflection, cultural criticism, and a representation of the realities of people’s lives (Cone, 1981; Nussbaum, 2007; Savage, 2009; Shepherd, 2012). Through its lyrics, melody, and musical structure, a song can capture the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of an era and convey messages that cannot always be expressed directly.

Previous research in the fields of the sociology of music and cultural studies has extensively examined how song lyrics can reflect social conditions during a specific period; for example, Bodden’s study of rap music and Weintraub’s study of Malay songs (Bodden, 2005; Weintraub, 2014). However, based on the researchers’ review, studies or research that specifically employ



hermeneutics to analyze social inequality in 1980s popular music in Indonesia are still rare. Therefore, this study can fill that gap.

Based on economic and social data released by the National Statistics Agency (BPS) on January 11, 1982, it is evident that during the period leading up to and throughout the 1980s, Indonesia was rapidly moving toward the peak of national development under the New Order regime led by President Suharto. This can be seen in the increasing density of urban populations due to migration from rural areas, as well as the emergence of an upper-middle class in urban areas, particularly outside Java. However, at the same time, this development was perceived as uneven; this can be observed in the widening socioeconomic gap, where the rich grew richer and the poor remained stagnant (Bachriadi, Dianto, 2011; Hindun et al., 2019; Piliang, 2023).

In the Indonesian context, one song worth examining is "*Singkong dan Keju*" by Bill and Brod (1986). This song explicitly presents a symbolic dichotomy between Cassava/*Singkong* and Cheese/*Keju*, representing social class differences, economic conditions, and inequalities in access to resources. Cassava, as a simple staple food of the common people, and cheese, as a symbol of consumption among the middle and upper classes, are positioned in a strong oppositional relationship, thereby creating a vivid portrayal of the social divide within society. This representation is not merely individual but also reflects broader and more complex social structures.

The issue of class inequality raised in this song aligns with the social dynamics unfolding in Indonesia during the 1980s, a period marked by economic growth, urbanization, and increasing social differentiation. In this context, the song "*Singkong dan Keju*" can be understood as a form of subtle social critique, where the lived experiences of the lower and upper classes are represented through simple yet meaningful culinary symbols. Thus, this song is not merely a product of popular culture but also a social document capturing the realities of its time.

Furthermore, this study aims to examine in depth how the song "*Singkong dan Keju*" conveys its social messages through a symbolic lyrical structure, as well as how it represents the social, economic, and cultural context of its creation. To achieve this objective, the study employs Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes the interpretation of texts as a dialectical process between understanding and explanation. This approach allows the researcher to interpret the hidden meanings behind linguistic structures, symbols, and metaphors, thereby revealing the ideological messages and social criticism in the lyrics more comprehensively.

The analysis was conducted by examining the lyrics word by word to identify the symbols of the era that represent the social conditions of that period. This process aims not only to understand textual meaning but also to explore contextual meanings related to the social, economic, and cultural realities of Indonesian society. Furthermore, this study seeks to address the question of to what extent the songs "*Singkong/Cassava*" and "*Keju/cheese*" remain relevant in reflecting issues of class inequality, which remain a crucial issue in Indonesian society to this day.

Therefore, this study is expected to make an academic contribution to the fields of popular music studies, the sociology of

music, and cultural studies, particularly in enriching our understanding of the role of songs as a medium for social critique and the representation of reality. Furthermore, this study is also expected to open up broader spaces for reflection regarding the relevance of older musical works in interpreting and understanding contemporary social dynamics.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using hermeneutic analysis to examine the meanings embedded in the lyrics of the song "*Singkong dan Keju*" by Bill and Brod (1986). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand meanings, symbols, and social messages that are contextual and interpretive in nature and thus cannot be explained through a quantitative approach. The primary focus of the analysis is directed at the song lyrics as the main object of study, which are viewed as a symbolic representation of the social and cultural reality of their time.

Data analysis was conducted using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework and the author's own elaborations, to emphasize the dialectical process of text interpretation through stages and explanations in order to achieve a deeper understanding of meaning. This approach views the text as an autonomous entity open to various possibilities of meaning, regardless of the author's intent (Ihde, 1971; John Brookshire Thompson, 1983; Ricoeur, 1981; Sweeney, 2010). In this context, song lyrics are analyzed as cultural texts that represent the social, economic, and ideological dynamics of Indonesian society.

The data analysis procedure in this study was conducted through four main stages. Specifically for the first and second stages, the author developed the methods himself (naïve understanding and symbolic interpretation) to refine the two stages of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory (analytical distance and philosophical reflection). First, literal reading (naïve understanding), which is the initial stage of understanding song lyrics by interpreting the literal meaning of every word, phrase, and sentence. In this stage, the researcher identifies explicit themes, narrative structures, and the diction used in the lyrics to obtain a general picture of the message being conveyed.

Second, symbolic interpretation, which is the stage of in-depth analysis of the symbols, metaphors, and relationships of meaning found in the song lyrics. At this stage, each linguistic element is analyzed as a symbolic representation containing social, cultural, and ideological meanings. Keywords such as "*Singkong/Cassava*" and "*Keju/Cheese*" are interpreted not merely as material objects, but as symbols representing social class differentiation, economic inequality, and the evolving social relations within society.

Third, the distancing of the text from the author (distantiation), which is the process of viewing song lyrics as a text possessing autonomous meaning and not solely dependent on the creator's intent. This stage enables researchers to interpret songs within a broader, cross-temporal social context, ensuring that the meanings derived are not confined to the historical circumstances of the song's creation but remain relevant for understanding contemporary social dynamics.

Fourth, philosophical reflection in achieving self-understanding, which is the stage where the results of interpretation do not merely stop at the interpretation of the text but are also directed toward critical reflection on the social realities faced by society. At this stage, the researcher relates the meaning of the lyrics to current social conditions, particularly within the context of class inequality, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of human positions and experiences within the social structure.

Data collection in this study was conducted through document analysis, with the primary data source being the lyrics of the song "*Singkong dan Keju*." Supporting data was obtained from various relevant literature sources, such as books, journal articles, and scholarly studies on popular music, the sociology of music, and hermeneutics. Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-interpretive approach, emphasizing the depth of meaning and the coherence of interpretation.

Through this approach, this study is expected to yield a holistic understanding of the symbolic meaning, social critique, and cultural relevance of "*Singkong/Cassava*" and "*Keju/Cheese*" in representing the dynamics of social inequality in Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION.

3.1 Result

A Brief History of Bill & Brod Band

Bill & Brod was one of the most influential Indonesian pop groups of the 1980s. The group gained widespread recognition for its humorous songs, social commentary, and cheerful, engaging musical style. In the Indonesian music industry landscape of that time, which was dominated by melancholic pop songs, the emergence of Bill & Brod brought a fresh and distinct new vibe. Through a light musical approach, simple lyrics, and a strong sense of entertainment, Bill & Brod successfully reached diverse segments of society and created works that were both popular and reflective of social realities.

The group was led by Arie Wibowo as lead vocalist and guitarist, alongside Nyong Anggoman (keyboard), Kenny Damayanti (vocals), Wawan Konikos (vocals), and Rully Bachrie (drums). Arie Wibowo himself was a key figure in the development of Indonesian popular music during the 1980s. Before forming Bill & Brod, he was active in various music groups, such as the Pambors Vocal Group and the Topan Group. His experience in radio, vocal group music, and his involvement in the entertainment industry shaped Arie's musical character—communicative, expressive, and closely connected to the daily lives of the people.

Arie Wibowo's musical career began to take off following his involvement with the Pambors Vokal Group, a vocal group affiliated with Radio Pambors Jakarta. This group was known as a creative platform for young musicians with a fresh and experimental musical style. One of the key works from this period was the song titled "*Bingung*," which was later rearranged and popularized under the title "*Madu dan Racun*." This transformation of the song marked an important phase in Arie Wibowo's musical journey, while also laying the foundation for the formation of Bill & Brod as a music group with a distinctive identity.



Figure 1. Cassette tapes of the albums *Madu dan Racun* (1985) and *Singkong dan Keju* (1986) by Bill and Brod

Bill & Brod's major success began with their debut album *Madu dan Racun* (1985), which surpassed one million copies in sales. This album not only produced hit songs but also solidified Bill & Brod's status as icons of 1980s pop music. This success continued with their second album, *Singkong dan Keju* (1986), which further strengthened their musical character through a combination of simple lyrics, humor, and subtle social criticism. Bill & Brod's songs are known for their ability to present everyday themes of society—such as social relationships, matters of love, and economic realities—wrapped in a light yet meaningful narrative.

Within the context of popular culture, Bill & Brod functioned not only as an entertainment entity but also as a medium for social reflection. Their lyrics collectively portray the lives of the lower-middle class, delivering social criticism through easily understandable symbols, and conveying moral messages persuasively. This makes Bill & Brod's works relevant for study within the frameworks of the sociology of music and cultural studies, particularly in efforts to understand the relationship between popular music and the social dynamics of Indonesian society.

The song "Singkong dan Keju" holds a significant position in Bill & Brod's discography because it explicitly features social symbols representing class differences and economic disparities. The use of the "Cassava and Cheese/Singkong dan Keju" metaphor not only reflects differing consumption preferences but also represents an unequal social structure. In the context of 1980s society, this symbolism reflects the reality of economic growth that was not fully accompanied by equitable distribution of prosperity. Therefore, this song serves as a significant subject of study in understanding how popular music can creatively and communicatively articulate social criticism.

Against this backdrop, Bill & Brod can be viewed as an important representation of the development of Indonesian pop music that is not only entertainment-oriented but also possesses a reflective and critical dimension regarding social reality. An analysis of the song "*Singkong dan Keju*/Cassava and Cheese" using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach is expected to reveal the song's symbolic meaning, ideological message, and social relevance, both within the context of its time and in contemporary Indonesian social reality.

Lyrics of the song Cassava and Cheese from Bill and Brod

You said you love me
Kau bilang cinta padaku
 I said think first
Aku bilang pikir dulu
 Our tastes are too different
Selera kita terlalu jauh berbeda
 Your perfume is from Paris
 Parfumu dari Paris
 Your shoes are from Italy
 Sepatumu dari Itali
 you said it for gangsi's sake
 kau bilang demi gangsi
 Everything is overseas
 Semua serba luar negeri
 Which is possible
Manakah mungkin
 Following your way
Mengikuti caramu
 Which is full of excitement
Yang penuh hura-hura
 I like jaipong, you like disco
Aku suka jaipong, kau suka disco
 I like cassava, you like cheese
 Aku suka singkong, kau suka keju
 I want a simple girl
 Aku dambakan seorang gadis Yang sederhana
 I'm just a cassava kid
 Aku ini hanya anak singkong
 I'm just a cassava kid
 Aku hanya anak singkong

Analysis of the Naïve Understanding of the Lyrics to the Song "Singkong dan Keju"

At the naïve understanding stage, the analysis focuses on the literal meaning of the lyrics without in-depth theoretical interpretation. The main objective of this stage is to capture the explicit message, the main theme, and the general outline of the narrative conveyed in the song.

Naïve understanding is a basic comprehension of the meaning of a word or sentence in a text. This can be seen in the definition of tempeh or tofu as food, without any further interpretation regarding the connection between that food and social class or anything else. More specifically, naïve understanding is the initial, very general understanding of a word, much like how a young child understands a word—there are no complex connotative elements. This is discussed in a book by Dalghren (1998):

"This book introduces a theory, Naive Semantics (NS), a theory of the knowledge underlying natural language understanding."

And further clarified by the following statement:

"The basic assumption of NS is that knowing what a word means is not very different from knowing anything else."

Literally, this song tells the story of a simple man, as indicated by the singer's role as a male vocalist who feels out of sync in terms of lifestyle and taste with the woman he loves. The "aku" character is portrayed as down-to-earth, simple, and grounded, while the "kamu" character represents a modern, glamorous

lifestyle oriented toward foreign products. This difference is clearly evident in the following lyrics:

*Parfummu dari Paris
Sepatumu dari Itali
kau bilang demi gangsi*

Literally, these lyrics reveal differences in social class, taste, and lifestyle orientation. The mention of perfume from Paris and shoes from Italy indicates the consumption of imported goods from distant places, which symbolically signify luxury and prestige. This is emphasized by the phrase “for the sake of prestige,” which suggests that the consumption of foreign products is done to build a social image and status. In this context, the character “*kamu/you*” is portrayed as highly concerned with prestige and symbols of luxury, while the character “*aku/i*” feels unable and unsuited to follow that lifestyle.

This contrast is further emphasized through cultural symbols and consumption in the following lyrics:

*Aku suka jaipong
kau suka disco, oh (oh), oh
Aku suka singkong,
kau suka keju, oh (oh) oh*

On a literal level, *jaipong* and *cassava/singkong* symbolize local traditions and simplicity. *Jaipong*, as a traditional dance of the Indonesian people, represents a folk culture closely tied to daily life and is often performed in open, community-oriented social settings. *Cassava*, as a readily available local food staple, also conveys a sense of simplicity and closeness to the lives of the working class. Conversely, *disco* and *cheese* represent modern and global culture. *Disco* music is synonymous with urban entertainment, while *cheese* is perceived as a foreign delicacy that is relatively uncommon in the rice-oriented dietary habits of Indonesian society. This contrast explicitly underscores the social and cultural divide between the “*Aku/I*” and “*kamu/you*” characters.

The “*I*” character also directly asserts their identity through the repetition of the lyrics:

*Aku ini hanya anak singkong
Aku hanya anak singkong*

Literally, the phrase “*cassava child/anak singkong*” signifies a simple, humble social identity closely tied to the lives of the common people. The repetition of this line reinforces the “*I*” character’s awareness of their inferior position while simultaneously demonstrating an attitude of self-acceptance regarding that condition.

Overall, through a literal reading, this song addresses the theme of differences in social background, lifestyle, and tastes within a romantic relationship. These differences create emotional distance, doubt, and incompatibility between the two individuals. The song conveys a narrative of failed love due to social and cultural disparities, from the perspective of the “*I*” character as the party who feels marginalized and unable to bridge those differences.

Analysis in the Second Stage: Symbolic Interpretation of the Lyrics of the Song “*Singkong dan Keju*”

In the symbolic interpretation stage, the analysis focuses on a deep interpretation of symbols, as well as the relationships of meaning contained within the song lyrics. Each linguistic element is understood not merely as a representation of a material object, but as a social symbol that carries cultural, ideological, and structural meanings within the context of societal life.

In a more general sense, a symbol is a concept that tends to be static, conceptual, and also limited. A concrete argument for this can be seen in (Wimsatt, 1950) interpretation of Martin Foss's view, who states:

“Symbol... carrying rather a logical connotation, means what for Mr. Foss is the opposite of metaphor, the conceptual”

A concrete example can be seen in the application of traffic lights, which are widely found in urban areas. Here, the red symbol means stop, yellow means caution, and green means go. Therefore, the purpose of this symbolic analysis is to uncover the static meanings—which tend to be limited—in each lyric of the song “*Singkong dan Keju*” based on common interpretations.

The primary symbol in this song lies in the opposition between Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*. Cassava is interpreted as a symbol of local food synonymous with simplicity, economic constraints, and the lives of the lower class. In the Indonesian social context, cassava is often associated with alternative food sources, consumption by the working class, and minimal economic conditions. Conversely, cheese represents an imported food product closely linked to the image of luxury, modernity, and the lifestyle of the middle and upper classes. Cheese functions not only as a marker of differing tastes but also as a symbol of prestige, cosmopolitanism, and global orientation. Thus, the contrast between Cassava and Cheese forms a metaphor for social class disparities and cultural orientation differences within society.

Similar symbolism is evident in the pairing of jaipong and disco. *Jaipong*, as a traditional Indonesian performing art, represents local identity, folk culture, and communal values that are collective and down-to-earth. Conversely, disco symbolizes modern entertainment culture, synonymous with urban life, individualism, and a glamorous nightlife. This opposition underscores the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, locality and globality, as well as simplicity and hedonism. Through these symbols, the song constructs a narrative about the cultural clashes experienced by individuals within social and romantic relationships.

Furthermore, the phrases “your perfume from Paris *Parfumu dari Paris* and “your shoes from Italy/*Sepatumu dari Itali*” function as symbols of cosmopolitanism and Western cultural hegemony. Paris and Italy do not merely indicate the geographical origin of the products but represent symbolic centers of Western civilization associated with fashion, elite lifestyles, and global prestige standards. The expression “for the sake of prestige/*kau bilang demi gengsi*” underscores that the consumption of foreign products is driven not only by functional needs but also by a symbolic urge to build a social image. Thus, these lyrics represent the practice of symbolic consumerism, where imported goods become tools for legitimizing social status and identity.

The identity of the “Cassava Child/*Anak Singkong*,” repeated in the lyrics, functions as a metaphor for class consciousness. This phrase not only reveals economic conditions

but also marks the social position of the "Aku" character within the social structure. The repetition indicates the internalization of a lower-class identity accompanied by a resigned attitude, while simultaneously serving as a symbolic critique of social inequality. The "Aku" character accepts his limitations as something inevitable, so that romantic relationships are understood within the framework of social determinism.

Overall, through the symbolic network of cassava-cheese, *jaipong*-disco, and Paris-Italy, the song "Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*" represents social realities such as class differentiation, economic disparity, and the dominance of global culture in society. This song does not merely tell a story of failed love, but produces a symbolic critique of unequal social structures and the penetration of modern values that displace local culture. Thus, the song's lyrics can be understood as an ideological reflection on the struggle between local identity and globalization in the context of contemporary Indonesian society.

Table 1. Binary Oppositions in Song Lyrics

| Binary Oppositions in Song Lyrics | | Key Different |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| I/Aku | You/Kau | "You and I" in the lyrics of this song highlights the contrast between two people who find themselves in vastly different circumstances |
| Cassava/ <i>Singkong</i> | Cheese/ <i>Keju</i> | Cassava itself is a symbol of the simpler diet of rural communities, while cheese is a symbol of the diet of urban communities, which tend to be. |
| <i>Jaipong</i> | Disco/ <i>Disko</i> | <i>Jaipong</i> dance is a symbol of traditional folk entertainment deeply rooted in local culture, while disco music is a symbol of bourgeois entertainment closely associated with an urban lifestyle. |
| Local/ <i>Lokal</i> | Global | "Local" refers to an entity with a narrower, more limited geographical scope, whereas "global" refers to a geographical entity that transcends national borders |

Third Stage Analysis: Distanciation between the text and the author in the lyrics of the song "*Singkong dan Keju*"

In the distanciation stage, the song lyrics are viewed as a text possessing autonomous meaning and not solely dependent on the subjective intentions of its creator. By distancing the text from the author's personal context, it is read as a representation of social discourse that can be interpreted across space and time. This approach allows researchers to understand the song "Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*" as a reflection of broader social dynamics, transcending the historical context in which it was created.

Distanciation analysis is a distanced analysis. Furthermore, Paul Ricoeur explains that the application of Distanciation Interpretation helps us better understand ourselves, because the meaning of the text is emphasized far from the author's intent, allowing for diverse interpretations based on societal needs. Here is Paul Ricoeur's view as cited in the article by Dreyer et al. (2009):

"Distanciation helps to preserve the text from the perishing of the moment. To interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text."

Similarly, in the song "Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*," although it was created in the 1980s and is far removed from contemporary life, a distancing interpretation opens up new

possibilities for interpretation that remain relevant to the current situation.

Furthermore, in this context, the song “Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*” can be read as a social critique of class structures and the growing practices of consumerism in modern society. The symbolic opposition between cassava and cheese, jaipong and disco, and local versus global not only reflects the social reality at the time of the song’s emergence but remains relevant in analyzing contemporary phenomena, particularly within the context of cultural and economic globalization. The differences in consumption preferences and lifestyles depicted in the lyrics serve as a metaphor for the social disparities that persist to this day.

Furthermore, the song’s text can be understood as a representation of the public’s identity crisis in the face of global cultural penetration. The dominance of Western symbols, such as Paris and Italy, illustrates how standards of social prestige are shaped by global cultural hubs, while local identities are positioned as inferior. This occurs within an urban context that tends to prioritize brands, global trends, and cosmopolitan lifestyles as symbols of social status.

By distancing itself from the author, the “Aku” in the song can be understood not as a specific individual, but as a collective representation of the lower-class social group experiencing symbolic marginalization. The identity of the “Cassava Child/*Anak Singkong*” reflects a class consciousness that remains relevant within Indonesia’s social structure, where access to economic and cultural capital remains unevenly distributed. Therefore, this song can be read as a universal narrative about the limitations of social mobility and structural inequality.

From a cross-temporal perspective, the song “Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*” remains relevant in analyzing social relations in the digital age, when social media accelerates the reproduction of symbols of luxury and widens the gap in class representation. The practices of lifestyle flexing, symbolic consumption, and self-image building based on global brands are growing stronger, ensuring that the themes addressed in this song continue to find relevance. Thus, the song’s text transcends the historical context of its creation and transforms into a critical discourse on contemporary consumer culture and social stratification.

Overall, through the process of distancing between the text and the author, the song “Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*” can be interpreted as an ideological reflection on power relations, class inequality, and identity negotiations in modern society. This approach opens up a broader interpretive space, allowing the song to be understood not merely as a personal expression, but as a social text that represents the structural and cultural dynamics in the lives of people across generations.

Fourth Stage Analysis: Philosophical Reflection (Self-Understanding) of the Lyrics of “Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*”

At the stage of philosophical reflection, the interpretation of the lyrics no longer stops at the text’s structure or the symbols it contains, but is directed toward self-understanding within the context of a broader social reality. In this stage, the song

"*Singkong dan Keju*" is positioned as a medium for reflecting on human experiences in confronting unequal social structures, particularly in terms of class relations and the distribution of prestige symbols.

Self-understanding analysis is closely tied to personal understanding. As Paul Ricoeur argues, self-understanding is intimately connected to the experiences or narratives lived by the interpreters. Where memories—whether good or bad—of past events play a significant role in shaping the resulting interpretation. For example, Person A, who has a traumatic experience listening to a song because the lyrics remind them of an ex-lover, will tend to interpret the song in a melancholic and somber tone. In contrast, Person B, who has no similar experience or connection to the same song lyrics, is likely to remain stoic and indifferent. This is further illustrated by Paul Ricoeur's view, as cited in (Laitinen, 2002) research:

"Self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation. Narratives as a central form of self-interpretation."

In this section, the personal nature of interpretation is very strong. Identical interpretations become virtually impossible.

The identity of the "Cassava Child/*Anak Singkong*" in the song not only represents economic conditions but also evokes an existential awareness of the individual's position within the social stratification. This phrase reflects the human experience of being aware of limited access to economic and cultural capital. In the context of contemporary society, such awareness remains relevant, especially when symbols of luxury and globalization serve as measures of social success. Individuals often judge themselves and are judged by others based on their ability to access branded products, an urban lifestyle, and a cosmopolitan image.

The philosophical reflection in this song invites listeners to question: is human identity determined solely by material possessions and symbols of prestige? The contrast between cassava and cheese, *jaipong* and disco, and the local and the global opens up space for contemplation on how self-worth is shaped in an increasingly consumerist society. This song demonstrates that class differences impact not only economic aspects but also influence emotional relationships, self-confidence, and even the courage to love.

In today's social context, class inequality remains a tangible issue. Access to education, job opportunities, and cultural capital is not distributed evenly. Social media, for instance, often reinforces success standards based on lifestyle and symbolic consumption. The phenomenon of "flexing" (showing off wealth) and the portrayal of glamorous lifestyles create social pressure that can deepen feelings of inferiority among groups lacking similar resources. In this context, the figure of the "Cassava Child/*Anak Singkong*" can be understood as a representation of an individual on the margins of the dominant structure, yet still striving to maintain his identity.

Philosophically, this song also offers an ethical stance of self-acceptance and simplicity as a form of resistance against the dominance of materialistic values. The line "I long for a simple girl/*Aku dambakan seorang gadis Yang sederhana!*" can be interpreted as a search for a relationship not based on social

status or prestige, but on equality of values and a simple life. In this regard, the song not only depicts limitations but also proposes a more humanistic alternative set of values.

Through this reflection, listeners are invited to realize that while social structures are indeed limiting, self-awareness can serve as a starting point for understanding reality more critically. The song "Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*" thus functions as a social mirror that allows individuals to reflect on the relationship between personal identity and the social structures that shape it. The self-understanding gained is not merely an acknowledgment of limitations, but an awareness of the dynamics of power, class, and values that shape human experience in modern society.

3.2 Discussion

After analyzing the hermeneutic interpretation of the song "Cassava and Cheese/*Singkong dan Keju*" by Bil and Brod above, it becomes clear that this song addresses more than just the difference in taste between the first and second speakers. Beyond that, the song vividly represents social class through its lyrical symbols. The lifestyle gap between the rich and the poor seems to have no common ground. It is as if two people living in vastly different worlds cannot unite, let alone live together forever.

This is similar to the class theory put forward by Karl Marx more than a century ago. In his view, Marx believed that social classes were deliberately created by those in power, resulting in the weak being unable to resist or not knowing how to resist due to the hierarchical pressure between capital and labor (Andrew, 1983; Marx, Karl, 1973; Marx, 2019; Saunders, 2006). In this song, this is clearly evident in the man's position, as if he is powerless or resigned in pursuing his love.

Furthermore, this story of a love across social classes is a common occurrence in the history of human life itself; we are also familiar with the classic tale of Cinderella, a simple village girl who had to dress according to the royal standards of the time before she was acknowledged and could join the bourgeoisie's ball. This story seems to suggest that if you aren't wealthy, you cannot interact as equals. Interestingly, although the song "*Singkong dan Keju*" was released way back in the 1980s, the social critique of this cross-class love story seems to never fade; its resonance remains felt in every era, and in the circumstances of human life, no matter when.

As for the concept of music as social criticism, it refers to music used as a medium to convey critical and sharp opinions regarding societal conditions. Specifically, music can take the form of demands such as efforts to revise public regulations, overthrow authoritarian regimes, raise environmental awareness, condemn social class divisions, and many others. Why is music chosen as a medium for expression? Simply put, because not everyone can express themselves through words, but only through art—specifically music. Additionally, there is a belief that musical media carries messages that are easily remembered because they are sung en masse and repeatedly. The legacy of protest music can be heard in the works of Iwan Fals, whose music sharply and incisively highlighted the policies of the New Order regime at the time.

If we analyze contemporary cultural phenomena based on the lyrics of the songs "*Singkong*" and "*Keju*", we can identify

trends such as flexing on social media, global brand culture, and consumption-based standards of success (Rosida, Ida, Fatimah Az Zahra & Azzahra, 2023; Susanto, Alton Eendarwanto Hadi & Purwanto, 2023). This is particularly intriguing because the lyrics of “Singkong” and “Keju” depict a humble nature—or the idea that it is inappropriate for the common people to declare their love for the elite. In the contemporary era, this attitude has shifted 180 degrees. Contemporary society often attempts to showcase personal success through personal posts, featuring branded clothing and expensive cars. A lifestyle of traveling to places that are currently trending. This strategy is considered successful in attracting potential partners who were previously out of reach. The reason people do this is because they feel they don't want to be outdone by others.

This is further illustrated by the statement from (Lu Yan et al., 2024):

“We found that consumers' self-presentation behavior on social media promotes tendencies for social comparison, thereby enhancing their conspicuous consumption.”

Thus, from the statement above, it can be concluded that the sense of prestige in modern society is perceived as higher than in previous decades. Society in the 1980s, when the song “Singkong dan Keju” was popular, was not as open as the contemporary era. This is due to the development of technology and the emergence of social media.

Despite all the previous analytical findings, the author still feels that this research is far from perfect. This is because the objects of analysis are limited to lyrics or text; there has been no further development of data such as listeners or the full context of music production. Additionally, the presentation of data can also be subjectively biased, as it is analyzed using hermeneutic theory, which leaves room for multiple interpretations. Therefore, hermeneutic analysis is also inseparable from the role of the researcher's own scholarly database. A researcher with experience and a robust database will produce critical and in-depth results, compared to a researcher with limited experience and insufficient scholarly resources.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on a hermeneutic analysis of the lyrics to the song “Singkong dan Keju” (Cassava and Cheese), popularized by Bill & Brod, this study demonstrates that the song not only tells a story of differing tastes in romantic relationships but also represents social class divides within society. Through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach, the meaning of the lyrics is understood in stages, beginning with literal meaning, symbolic interpretation, textual distancing, and finally philosophical reflection.

The analysis reveals that symbols such as cassava and cheese, jaipong and disco, and the use of foreign products represent differences in social class, lifestyle, and cultural orientation between the working-class and those oriented toward global prestige. Through these symbols, the song offers a social critique of consumerism and social inequality that remains relevant today.

Thus, “Cassava and Cheese” can be understood as a cultural text that functions not only as entertainment but also as a

medium for social reflection, depicting the dynamics of class, identity, and values within Indonesian society.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

This article was primarily written by Akbar Bagaskara; the other authors were responsible for reviewing it to identify and address any potential shortcomings. They also assisted in ensuring the correct use of translation terminology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to Chulalongkorn University, the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, Lambung Mangkurat University, and China Foreign University—the institutions where we were educated and have continued to develop our knowledge to this day.

DECLARATIONS

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Manuscript Preparation

It is also undeniable that this article was aided by Artificial Intelligence (Chat GPT), such as in searching for references and helping to correct grammar so that it can be read more easily.

REFERENCES

- Andrew, E. (1983). Class in itself and class against capital: Karl Marx and his classifiers. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 16(3), 577–584. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26418/jebik.v8i3.34721>.
- Bachriadi, Dianto, and G. W. (2011). *Enam dekade ketimpangan. Masalah Penguasaan Tanah di Indonesia*. Agrarian Resource Centre, Bina Desa dan Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria.
- Bodden, M. (2005). Rap in Indonesian Youth Music of the 1990s: "Globalization," "Outlaw Genres," and Social Protest. *Asian Music*, 36(2), 1–26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4098514>.
- Cone, E. T. (1981). The authority of music criticism. *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 34(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/831032>.
- Fadhilah, Y. (2019). Kritik dan Realitas Sosial dalam Musik (Analisis Wacana Kritis pada Lirik Lagu Karya Iksan Skuter "Lagu Petani"). *Jurnal Commercium*, 1(2), 113–118.
- Hindun, H., Soejoto, A., & Hariyati, H. (2019). Pengaruh Pendidikan, Pengangguran, dan Kemiskinan terhadap Ketimpangan Pendapatan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ekonomi Bisnis Dan Kewirausahaan*, 8(3), 250. <https://doi.org/10.26418/jebik.v8i3.34721>.
- Ihde, D. (1971). *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosopher of Paul Ricoeur*. Northwestern University Press.
- John Brookshire Thompson. (1983). *Critical hermeneutics: A study in the thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. Cambridge University Press.
- Laitinen, A. (2002). Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur on self-interpretations and narrative identity. *Narrative Research: Voices of Teachers and Philosophers*, 57–76.
- Lu Yan, Zhao, T., Song, S., & Song, W. (2024). Can self-presentation on social media increase individuals' conspicuous consumption tendency? A mixed-method empirical study

- on WeChat in China. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 19(2), 1206–1221.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer19020062>.
- Marx, Karl, and F. E. (1973). *Karl Marx on society and social change: With selections by Friedrich Engels*. University of Chicago Press.
- Marx, K. (2019). Alienation and social classes. In *Social Stratification, Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective* (pp. 87–91). Routledge.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429306419-13/alienation-social-classes-karl-marx>
- Nussbaum, C. O. (2007). *The musical representation: Meaning, ontology, and emotion*. MIT Press.
- Piliang, M. Z. (2023). Pengelolaan Ekonomi Indonesia: Pengalaman Orde Baru. *At-Tanmiyah Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Islam*, 2(1), 207–238. <https://ejurnalstebis.ac.id/index.php/At-Tanmiyah/index>
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rosida, Ida, Fatimah Az Zahra, F. T., & Azzahra, S. (2023). Flexing culture in the age of social media: From social recognition to self-satisfaction. *Simulacra*, 6(2), 193–208.
<https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v6i2.20716>.
- Saunders, P. (2006). *Social class and stratification*. Routledge.
- Savage, R. W. (2009). *Hermeneutics and music criticism*. Routledge.
- Shepherd, J. (2012). Music and social categories. In *The cultural study of music* (pp. 239–248). Routledge.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203149454-26/music-social-categories-john-shepherd>
- Surya Permana, C. (2022). Uncovering Cultural Capital in Indonesia's Underground Music Scene: A Discourse. *Jomantara: Indonesian Journal of Art and Culture*, 2(Vol. 2 No. 2 July 2022), 94–103.
<https://doi.org/10.23969/ijjac.v2i2.5578>.
- Susanto, Alton Endarwanto Hadi, H. A. N., & Purwanto, A. (2023). Lifestyle: Flexing behavior in social media." *International Journal of Economics (IJEC)* 2, no. 1 (2023): 27-31. *International Journal of Economics (IJEC)*, 2(1), 27–31.
<https://doi.org/10.55299/ijec.v2i1.410>.
- Sweeney, R. D. (2010). Arts, language and hermeneutical aesthetics: Interview with paul ricoeur (1913-2005). *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 36(8), 935–951.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453710375592>.
- Weintraub, A. N. (2014). Pop goes melayu: Melayu popular music in Indonesia, 1968–1975. In *Sonic modernities in the Malay world* (pp. 163–186). Brill.
- Wimsatt, W. K. (1950). Symbol and Metaphor. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 4(2), 279–290.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20123213>.