

“AMERICAN IDIOT” SONGS: ON SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to find out the meaning contained in the song American Idiot, which was popularized by Green Day. Apart from that, about the link between the song and what is happening now. This article uses a qualitative approach, where data sources are obtained from articles, news, and interviews. From this research, it can be seen that this song contains criticism of the songwriter wants to convey about his country. This song is also very relevant in describing what is happening right now.

Keywords: *American Idiot, Green Day, Semiotic, Sign*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone would love to listen to music. Music is not just a series of words pronounced in rhythm but can be a means of communication. Cross (2014) said that music is a communication medium that is liked by many people. In music, we indirectly communicate, and what makes this not dull is because there is a rhythm in it. This then makes music so popular among people.

Cross, still in the same article, says that music can be an accepted medium of communication in various situations, conditions, and times. Even though the music has been created or made for a long time, the word order and language used may still be related to current or future situations and conditions. Related to words and language, then in the music, there must be lyrics which are then pronounced with the rhythm so that it becomes a song. These lyrics are then used as a medium for communicating, conveying opinions, or just entertaining people.

In connection with that, some singers make songs only for entertainment, and some make songs as a means of conveying opinions or criticism of either the government

or social life. In Indonesia, Iwan Fals is one of the singers whose songs have criticized the government both denotatively and connotatively. Globally, there is one song that has always been used as material for analysis in the fields of language and politics. The song is titled American Idiot which is sung by an American band, Green Day.

This song, at first glance, is just an ordinary song. However, when viewed as a whole, this song is exciting to discuss because the lyrics used both denotatively and connotatively contain elements of criticism both in the government at that time and on people's lives. Billie Joe Armstrong, the songwriter, revealed that this song is indirectly related to the nine eleven tragedy that hit America in 2001 (Egerdahl, 2010).

Based on the above, the writer is interested in analyzing the song in depth. The analysis used is semiotic analysis developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. Semiotics is a science that studies signs. Signs are tools we use in trying to find our way in this world (Setyadi, Putri, & Putra, 2018). When seen, the sign is part of communication which then includes language.

Semiotics, or in sociological terms, is about studying how humanity interprets things. Interpreting means that objects want to carry information, in which case the objects want to communicate, but also constitute the system from signs (Sobur, 2006). Thus we understand each other's meaning in the communications we build with others.

Kaelan (2009) in Nugraha (2016) states that based on the scope of the discussion, semiotics is divided into the following three types:

1. Pure Semiotics discusses the philosophical basis of semiotics, which is related to metalanguage, in the sense of the universal essence of language.
2. Descriptive semiotics is the scope of semiotics, which discusses specific semiotics, for example, a particular sign system or a specific language descriptively.
3. Applied Semiotics is the scope of semiotics, which discusses the application of semiotics in a particular field or context.

Many semiotic concepts developed by Saussure, including Langue-Parole, Diachronic-Synchronic, Signifier-Signified, Syntagmatic-Paradigmatic. The semiotic concept is very influential in the process of meaning and interpretation of signs. so that there are so many meanings and interpretations created in a sign/language used (Sukyadi, 2013).

From some of the explanations above, the author is interested in analyzing what is in the American Idiot song with a semiotic study which is then related to the current

living conditions. Because when seen and heard, the song is still relevant to what is happening now. Thus the problem that arises is What is the meaning of the lyrics of the song entitled American Idiot according to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics? and how does it relate to people's lives today?

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand things that are understood by individuals or groups of social or humanitarian problems (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is words and actions; the rest is additional data (Badara, 2014). In this regard, the data source in this study is the lyrics of the song American Idiot by Green Day. Besides that the data is also about the results of research, news and information about the history of the song. Moreover, about what is happening in people's lives today?. Data analysis in this study is organized and sorted into a unit so that it is easy to process, analyze and find patterns that emerge, decide what is essential and can be shared with others (Moloeng, 2017).

DISCUSSION

The song American Idiot was popularized by the band Green Day from the United States. This song is part of an album of the same name that was released in 2004. Green Day is a metal punk band. Many attribute this song to what happened after the nine eleven tragedy. It is a human tragedy in the form of an act of terrorism targeting the WTC building in the United States (Widiyani, 2020).

In general, this song has two stanzas, one chorus, and one bridge. Where each stanza is interspersed with one chorus. Therefore, the song pattern is the first stanza, chorus, second stanza, chorus, bridge and last chorus. Even though there are three chorus times, but all the same, lyrics are just repeated. (Anonymous, 2015)

In this part of the discussion, we start with the first verse. In this first stanza consists of four lines.

*Don't wanna be an American Idiot
Don't want a nation under the new mania
Hey can you the sound of hysteria*

The subminal mind-fuck America

In this section, the lyrics explain not being an idiot citizen. Then, do not be a follower or too fanatical to follow something either. This will create mass hysteria. Much can be explained in this section, especially about what is happening now. The first is about not being an idiot citizen. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2005), an idiot is a stupid person, or in softer language, a person who cannot think properly. This sentence or meaning can be explained denotatively or connotatively.

Denotatively, it can be explained that we, as citizens, must know so that we can live well. In a connotative way, these lyrics explain that we, as citizens of society, should be able to become independent or independent humans. Humans who can think clearly. So that we can choose and sort out which information is useful and correct.

These lyrics appear related to what happened to society at that time. After the nine eleven tragedy, with the intense media narrative about the perpetrators of the tragedy, they became phobias of the Muslim community. They think that the Muslim community is a society that likes violence. These narratives then make some Americans phobic about Islam (Keys, 2020).

Then what is the connection with what is happening now? Now many people can say the same as what happened to American society at that time. Along with the rapid development of technology, access to information should be getting better. However, due to low literacy, sometimes the information obtained is not validated. This then leaves the public with misinformation. Moreover, worse, this misinformation is then turned into something right. The hoax element is the same as the "fraud" element. Hoax spreaders do not have to have a definite goal. Therefore, the hoax is an act that can be included in the scope of criminal law. His actions spread the issue of lies that affect the minds of individuals who collect into massive thoughts. (Hidaya, Qalby, Alaydrus, Darmayanti, & Salsabila, n.d.)

Next in the second stanza,

Well, maybe I'm the faggot, America

I'm not a part of redneck agenda

Now everybody do the propaganda

And sing along to the age of paranoia

In this part of the lyrics, it is explained about the propaganda carried out by several influential people to cause unrest in the community. The word "redneck agenda" in the lyrics was associated with the American parliament's ruling party, the Republican Party known as the red party.

In this section, it is explained in general that the Republican Party, where President G. W. Bush originated, always carried out propaganda so that the Iraq war emerged with the nine eleven tragedy as the reason. Even openly in the 2006 election, President Bush asked Americans to vote for a republican party because America was at war with Iraq. (Anonymous, 2020) This certainly reinforces that the phrase "redneck agenda" in the song is closely related to the efforts of the ruling party in America at that time to spread propaganda so that they can continue to wage war on the grounds of war on terror.

Then what happens now? At present, the propaganda is more subtle, especially in the use of social media. This is because almost everyone, from children to the elderly, definitely uses social media. If the propaganda is positive, it is not too problematic. However, when it is aimed negatively, the impact will be even more significant. Moreover, most social media users are teenagers, where they find it difficult to distinguish which information is right and wrong because of the puns of the propaganda maker. Mukramin (2019), in his research, suggests that children and adolescents are greatly influenced by the content provided by the communication media. The use of communication media not only has a positive impact but also has a negative impact that can harm its users, especially for children who are quickly affected and have high curiosity, so that indirectly adolescents or children can access something negative.

The last part in the analysis of this song is, the lyrics of the bridge.

Don't wanna be an American idiot

One nation controlled by the media

Information age of hysteria

It's calling out to idiot America

In this section, it is explained that the media should not control us in our actions. This was what happened at that time. Because of the violent and massive media narrators, many citizens were affected. This was later criticized by Green Day in this song. They feel bored with the condition of society. It also shows how the media can influence people's thinking and actions.

Already explained above, the information media can significantly influence people's behavior. There are many information media; it can be a news website, television broadcast, or social media. At this time, social media's influence is vast because almost everyone uses social media to share information. There are even more than 50 million active social media users based on data obtained by the Indonesian Ministry of Information and Communication (2013). With this data, it is not wrong if all information, good or bad, is always on social media because it will easily influence readers. This, then can support the results of the research that Mukramine has done above. Where social media can have a huge influence in society.

From the analysis results above, it can be seen; if viewed from the semiotic side, this song has many meanings and interpretations. There are so many signs that appear in this song. Everyone can understand the message to be conveyed. This then also proves that the song's language or music can communicate and interact. Even though it is only one direction, the message conveyed is profound and by what happened. This song can explain what happened when this song was created and can be significantly related to what is happening now.

If it is related to what is happening now, in the interviews on radio in England, Billie said that what is happening now is almost the same as what happened when this song was created. In Indonesia, this condition is also happening. Not only from the government but also from the people and media who influence this country. We can see that many narratives knock each other out but, on the one hand, elevate the group. What with the rapid development of technology, it makes the flow of information circulating even more uncontrollable. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish which one is right and what is wrong.

CONCLUSION

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that this song has a perfect meaning. Among them is the expression of their thoughts about what is happening in this world. Their thoughts in this song are conveyed well even though the language used is a little bit hard and not pleasant to hear. However, that is the reality that happened. Then, related to what is happening now, this song is still very relevant in discussing what is happening. Everything in the lyrics of this song, when viewed, also describes what is

happening in the present. This song can be a social criticism to everyone. So that in the future, it can be better at behaving.

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