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Representation of Domestic Violence Victims in the Lyrics of 'Ibu' by Pangalo! (Sara Mill's Critical Discourse Analysis)

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Abstract

Background: Domestic violence is still a complex social issue in Indonesia, where women are often positioned as victims in a patriarchal culture that normalizes violence as part of the marriage relationship. This phenomenon is interesting to study through the lyrics of the song 'Ibu' by Pangalo!, which depicts a critical reflection on gender construction and power relations in popular culture. **Purpose:** This research aims to explore how domestic violence is represented in the lyrics of the song 'Ibu' by Pangalo! through Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis. **Methods:** The method used was qualitative with a linguistic approach (critical discourse analysis) based on Sara Mills' model. **Results:** Findings show that the lyrics of the song 'Ibu' strongly reflect patriarchal ideology, depicting mothers as passive victims who endure physical and emotional violence while justifying their suffering due to cultural and religious dogma. However, Pangalo! also shows resistance in his lyrics, challenging the normalization of domestic violence and fighting for gender equality. **Conclusion:** This study demonstrates that popular music can serve as a medium of social critique by exposing the normalization of gender-based violence. The results contribute to gender and communication studies by showing how song lyrics shape empathy toward victims and raise awareness of equality, making this research relevant for future cultural discourse analysis.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis; domestic violence; gender representation; popular music*

INTRODUCTION

Music is not just beautiful melodies that delight the ears. The lyrics contain messages and implied meanings in accordance with the intentions of the lyricist. Creators channel a variety of expressions into song lyrics, ranging from feelings and thoughts to personal life experiences. Not only that, lyrics can be used as a means of conveying social criticism, moral messages, and the creator's ideas. The purpose of music created by musicians includes explaining, entertaining, and expressing their personal experiences to a wide audience (Purnama et al., 2024). In the digital age, the elements of music and language as well as the selection of visuals have enriched meaning, creating an emotional atmosphere (Forte, 2023).

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In Indonesia, music is capable of asserting presence, reconfiguring representations, and challenging cultural hierarchies in the digital era (Ismail, 2025). One song that is interesting

to analyze in this context is the song '*Ibu*' by Pangalo! This song describes the suffering of a mother who is a victim of domestic violence, but is told from the perspective of a child. This perspective opens up space to read how the trauma of violence is passed on and felt by other family members, especially children. The lyrics of this song present a personal story that is emotionally and symbolically rich, making it interesting to study through a critical discourse approach.

Several previous studies have examined how women and violence are represented in song lyrics. For example, Betti et al., (2023) found that many popular songs contain sexist lyrics that demean women. Meanwhile, Chen et al., (2024) used topic modeling and gender bias measurement techniques to find that lyrics often associate women with weakness and appearance, while men are associated with intelligence and strength, indicators of structural bias that are widespread across various music genres. In Indonesia, Kusumaningsih et al., (2024) highlighted stereotypes of women in vulgar dangdut songs, while Pinasthiko Aji & Kusumawati (2023) showed how koplo song lyrics can be a space for criticism of patriarchy. However, there have been few studies that specifically explore the representation of domestic violence victims in song lyrics, especially from the perspective of a child narrator.

This study will present representations of domestic violence victims contained in the lyrics of the song “*Ibu*” using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis approach. Various previous studies have utilized Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis approach to examine representations of women, including in the context of domestic violence. This approach focuses on the subject-object position and the reader in the text, as well as how hidden ideologies can direct the audience's perception of certain narratives (Abdullah, 2019). In a study of the media, Sulistio et al., (2022) analyzed domestic violence news published by *detik.com* and found that the narratives in the text tended to portray women as passive objects, even blaming themselves for the violence they experienced. The news writers implicitly positioned the perpetrators as rational figures, while the victims were presented as helpless, revealing the narrator's dominance in shaping public opinion in accordance with a hidden patriarchal ideology.

In the field of music, a study that examines song lyrics using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis approach is a study conducted by (Fredyansah et al., 2023) entitled *Representations of Women in French Rap Songs*. This study found differences in how women are represented when rap songs are sung by men and women. For men, the rap songs studied show that women are passive, traditional, seductive, and materialistic. Meanwhile, when sung by women, women tend to be portrayed in a more favorable light as confident, independent, determined, and competitive. This assessment is based on clauses found in each line of rap lyrics, which are then grouped according to elements of transitivity, participants, processes, and circumstances.

In popular culture studies, the representation of women in music is an important locus for re-reading power relations and patriarchal ideology that operate through symbols and aesthetic language. Popular music not only functions as an aesthetic expression, but also as a hegemonic medium that reproduces images of women within a domestic, emotional, and subordinate framework, as found in the analysis of Indonesian pop and dangdut song lyrics (Salsabila, 2025). The study by Putri et al., (2025) shows that despite a shift towards expressions of female independence and autonomy, feminine constructions are still limited by discourses of morality and modesty rooted in patriarchal structures. This phenomenon shows that music plays a dual role: on the one hand, it reinforces patriarchal ideology, but

on the other hand, it opens up space for symbolic resistance through the representation of women as empowered subjects. Rasmini & Kusuma (2025) asserts that the construction of women in music often shifts in line with the dynamics of digital culture, where women are no longer merely narrative objects, but also actors who construct identity and meaning through musical performativity. Thus, the study of Pangalo!'s song '*Ibu*' has academic significance because it reveals how music becomes a dialectical arena between reproduction and resistance to patriarchal discourse in contemporary Indonesian popular culture.

This study is novel because it examines Indonesian song lyrics with the theme of domestic violence using Sara Mills' AWK approach. Until now, this approach has been used more in the analysis of news or literary texts, not songs. In addition, this song is unique because the narrator is a child, not a direct victim. This provides a different perspective in seeing the impact of domestic violence, not only on the main victim but also on the surrounding environment, especially the family. However, this study also faces several challenges. One of them is the limitation in interpreting the meaning of lyrics that are symbolic and open to interpretation. In addition, the issue of domestic violence is a sensitive topic, so the analysis must be carried out carefully so as not to perpetuate stereotypes or blame the victim. Researchers must also ensure that the interpretations made remain on the side of the victim and contribute to public awareness. Based on the background explanation, the main objective of this study is to examine how the representation of domestic violence victims, especially mothers, is constructed in the lyrics of Pangalo! song '*Ibu*' using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis approach. This study also aims to see how the positions of the narrator, victim, and listener are formed in the text, as well as their impact on the meaning of violence and public empathy. The results of this study are expected to enrich the contribution to a more critical and empathetic understanding of the issue of domestic violence.

METHODS

This study uses a critical-qualitative paradigm, as it focuses on revealing the construction of ideology, domination, and power in shaping social structures (Hasan et al., 2025). The method used is descriptive qualitative, with Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis approach, which aims to understand the position of the object, subject, and listener in the lyrics of the song '*Ibu*'. This study involves the complete lyrics of the song '*Ibu*' by Pangalo! as the main data corpus. The data collection technique was carried out through documentation, namely collecting and copying the lyrics from official sources (music platforms, YouTube, or trusted lyrics websites). This technique is in line with what Moleong (2019) explained, that in qualitative research, documentation is an important method for obtaining data from authentic written texts.

This study will begin with immersive reading of all song lyrics to understand the context, narrative, and language structure. Next, open coding will be performed on important words or phrases such as: silent, crying, hurt, which describe the position of the victim. Next, axial coding will be carried out, which is grouping these codes into themes such as: representation of passive victims, children's voices as witnesses, and listeners' narratives of empathy. The parameters observed in this study include: (1) the construction of the mother's position (object), whether she is described as an active or passive subject; (2) the depiction of the father (subject), how he commits violence and symbolizes patriarchy; (3) style of

language, important words or phrases related to (silence, crying, asking for help); and (4) the position of the reader or listener, how the text directs empathy, identification, or moral response.

After coding, the data will be analyzed to determine whether the discourse construction supports empathy or reinforces the narrative of victims as passive figures. This interpretation is juxtaposed with Sara Mills' concept (subject-object and writer-reader positions in discourse) to examine the ideological forces at work. Next, the validity of the data is tested through data triangulation, for example by consulting with fellow researchers or comparing interpretations with other texts and supporting literature.

Methodologically, the application of Sara Mills' model to contemporary music analysis contributes new insights to the study of gender representation. Until now, this model has been widely used in news or literary texts, but its application to song lyrics opens up space for reading music as an ideological discourse that produces and negotiates gender meanings symbolically. Through this approach, the research not only dissects the content of the lyrics, but also shows how narrative position, power relations, and listener emotions play a role in perpetuating or challenging patriarchal hegemony. Thus, this research expands the scope of Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis to the realm of popular culture and offers a new methodological framework for examining gender relations in musical practice in the digital age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The analysis was conducted based on the data collection technique stage, using the lyrics of the song 'Ibu' by Pangalo! as follows.

Title : Ibu

By : Pangalo!

*Dia bersembunyi di lemari saat kecil hati berdoa
Ibunya tersedu menangis dipukuli Ayah
Lebam ke dua mata, bibirnya berdarah
Namun ibunya selalu bilang: Ayahmu tak sengaja
Dan kerap kali ia terbangun di pagi buta
Saat Ayahnya pulang mabuk dan langsung marah-marah
Hey kau ini istri macam apa?
Suami Lelah bekerja tapi kau di rumah malah tidur-tidur saja
Lalu Ibu minta maaf, meskipun sedari pagi ia belum juga istirahat
Bekerja di dapur warung berpeluh keringat
Yang dia lihat selalu dia ingat
Ibunya tak pernah mengeluh meski lehernya terikat
Bu, mengapa kau bodoh?
Mengapa dirimu betah pada cinta yang selalu membuat hatimu terluka?
Apa kau Bahagia? Mengapa memiliki menikah bila berakhir seperti neraka?*

Mengapa bertahan bila semua yang kau dapatkan tak seperti harapan?

*Kau kan mengerti nak
Nanti kau kan pahami
Kau kan mengerti nak
Nanti kau kan pahami semua*

*Kau tersenyum Ibu ke padauk
Tapi di matamu ada tatap pilu
Lalu kau dekapku di pelukmu
Kau menahan haru, bisik kepadaku
Oh anakku hidup macam lagu
Maaf nak, bila hidupmu penuh dengan nada sendu, nada sendu, nada sendu
Rumah seperti penjara, kau punya suara tapi tak bisa bicara
Hatiku mengenal hanya dua warna rasa
Tangis dan amarah, maki juga dusta
Dia bahkan menyiksa saat kalian bercinta
Apa makna cinta? bila jalannya ditaburi luka dan rasa kecewa
Apa makna sumpah dalam Masyarakat 'tuk menjalin keluarga?
Persetan semua doktrin juga dogma
Yang mengajarkan bahwa wanita hanya tuk layani hidup pria
Tuhan bukan bapa, bukan pula ibu, kita sama saja
Sama-sama lahir dari semesta, tapi sistem agama pisahkan kita*

Subject-Object Position

Based on the analysis conducted from the data obtained by listening and identifying Sara Mills' subject-object position as follows

Subject Position

The subject in the lyrics of Pangalo! song '*Ibu*' is Father. The word father is the subject in the lyrics. Father in the lyrics is described as a harsh and domineering figure. The author describes him as a harsh and domineering figure. The author depicts the father in the lyrics as an emotional, violent, and dominant figure. This is illustrated in the second verse of the song, "*Ibunya tersedu menangis dipukuli Ayah*," and in the sixth line, "*Ayahnya pulang mabuk dan langsung marah-marah*."

The lyrics of this song begin with the subject's violence, which is expressed in the second and third verses and then continues in the sixth to eighth verses.

.....
*Ibunya tersedu menangis dipukuli Ayah
Lebam ke dua mata, bibirnya berdarah*

.....
*Saat Ayahnya pulang mabuk dan langsung marah-marah
Hey kau ini istri macam apa?*

Suami Lelah bekerja tapi kau di rumah malah tidur-tidur saja

This sentence describes the subject as a dominant person, where the subject here is the father. As a man, the father positions himself as a dominant figure. This condition stems from the patriarchal culture that is still embraced by many people. In a patriarchal culture, men often have a higher and more powerful position than women (wives). Therefore, in a household relationship, it is not uncommon for men (husbands) to feel entitled to make important decisions in the family without consulting their wives, and they also try to control their wives' finances, social life, and activities. In more extreme cases, the attitude of dominance and control exhibited by men leads to physical and emotional abuse.

Hey kau ini istri macam apa?

Suami Lelah bekerja tapi kau di rumah malah tidur-tidur saja

This excerpt from the song indirectly describes a very traditional gender role, namely that of the wife as the “housekeeper (pengurus rumah tangga)” who is expected to always be active at home and support her husband. The narrative that emerges is that the husband works hard, while the wife does nothing at home except lie around, according to the author's view. In this case, the lyrics reinforce the patriarchal cultural view of women in the household. In the line “*Hey kau ini istri macam apa?*”, there is a harsh tone towards women. This is a form of how social roles are very limited for women, especially in domestic roles. By using this sentence, the author tries to place wives in a position that is considered not to meet social expectations regarding domestic roles. It also reflects the view that housework is the primary duty of a wife, while the husband, as the breadwinner, has the right to criticize his wife if she does not perform this role properly.

This excerpt from the lyrics also reflects values that discredit housework, as seen in the phrase “*tidur-tidur saja*.” In this view, housework is considered unproductive or worthless compared to work that generates money. This is a criticism of the tendency to view housework as secondary or even invisible work, even though many feminists argue that housework is just as important as work done outside the home. In the verse “*Suami Lelah bekerja tapi kau di rumah malah tidur-tidur saja*,” this situation illustrates that the subject who is tired from work is in a superior position, while the wife is considered to be sleeping all day, which indicates an inferior position. In Mills' analysis, this is a reflection of the patriarchal power structure that places women in a lower position in the social and economic hierarchy. Power in this relationship is more often held by the husband, who has the right to criticize his wife.

The phenomenon in these lyrics shows how social constructs regarding gender and roles in the household can influence the way we view the work of women and men. These lyrics create a narrative that reinforces the patriarchal cultural view of women's duties as wives and mothers responsible for taking care of the household. In the patriarchal cultural view, there is a sentiment towards women that they belong in the kitchen, the well, and the bed. In this case, the lyrics of this song can be considered a depiction of the gender inequality that exists in society

Object Position

The object of this study is the mother. The mother in this song is depicted as an object of violence. She is a victim of domestic violence and is positioned as the weaker party. However, on the other hand, she also has strength in the form of her resilience.

Ibunya tersedu menangis dipukuli Ayah

Lebam ke dua mata, bibirnya berdarah

Namun Ibunya selalu bilang: Ayahmu tak sengaja

In this excerpt, women (mothers) are portrayed as victims within the patriarchal power structure. In many cultural texts, women are often depicted as passive victims who experience violence and suffering without any means of resistance or agency to change the situation. The mother who is described as “*tersedu menangis*” shows how trapped she is in an unequal power relationship. In patriarchy, women are often placed in a position of subordination, where they experience violence, both physical and emotional, and this role is reinforced by the depiction in the lyrics of this song. This song lyric describes physical violence that occurs in the home, where the mother is the victim of violence by the father. The lyrics not only describe physical violence, but also how this violence is accepted or hidden through the language used in the song. In many patriarchal cultures, domestic violence is often considered a private matter that should not be disclosed or openly opposed. “*Ibunya tersedu menangis dipukuli Ayah*” – these lyrics describe a wife who is beaten by her husband without any clear reaction or resistance from outside parties, reflecting how this type of violence is often hidden or considered part of the dynamics of marriage.

The sentence “*Namun Ibunya selalu bilang: Ayahmu tak sengaja*” illustrates how the mother tries to rationalize or justify the violence she experienced. In many patriarchal cultures, women are often encouraged to ignore or blame themselves for the violence that occurs, even when it is clearly violence. This opinion illustrates women's inability to express or acknowledge their true experiences because they are bound by social norms that require them to remain loyal to their partners or families, even when they experience violence. In this case, the mother portrays herself as defending and covering up her husband's mistakes, which is an example of the internalization of patriarchal norms

DISCUSSION

Discourse on Silencing the Voices of Victims of Domestic Violence

The lyrics of Pangalo! Song ‘*Ibu*’ describe the social conditions of women (wives) living in a patriarchal culture, where men hold the highest authority in the family. This culture places women in a position of weakness, limits their freedom of movement, and

denies them the freedom to make life choices. Oppression against women is ingrained as a social mindset due to the patriarchal system that places men as the dominant group with full control in both public and domestic life (Najna & Maryam, 2020). In this context, women often face discrimination, stigma, and negative stereotypes that further marginalize their position in social life.

National data shows how the discourses in this song reflects social reality in Indonesia. Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPA) from January 1, 2025, shows that there were 24,979 cases of domestic violence, with women accounting for 21,390 of the victims. The province with the highest number of cases of violence against women was West Java with 983 cases (KemenPPA, 2025). This situation is consistent with research by Fintari & Sunarto (2018), which shows that beliefs about the sanctity of the household and low self-esteem cause many women to choose to remain in abusive relationships.

The song '*Ibu*' clearly narrates this silencing. The lyrics, "*Rumah seperti penjara, kau punya suara tapi tak bisa bicara*," describe the helplessness experienced by victims, as well as criticizing the social structure that silences women's voices. This phenomenon illustrates how women often do not have the space to openly express their suffering. Within the framework of Sara Mills' discourse analysis, the position of women in this song is not only as objects of violence, but also as subjects whose consciousness is trapped in patriarchal ideology. She normalizes violence by saying, "*Ayahmu tak sengaja*."

Interestingly, when compared to global trends in digital music discourse analysis, this phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia. Research by (Chen et al., 2024) shows that gender bias in global popular song lyrics tends to follow a similar pattern, namely the representation of women as passive, emotional, and subordinate to men. A cross-country study conducted by Casanovas-Buliart et al., (2024) of 62 years of global music lyrics found that sexism in lyrics persists even in the digital age, despite a shift in discourse towards equality in some alternative genres. Thus, Pangalo!'s song *Ibu* can be read as part of a global trend in which music becomes an arena for social discourse, both in reinforcing and challenging the patriarchal system.

Social Ideology and Doctrine

Although the lyrics of the song '*Ibu*' contain a narrative of silencing, there are also strong elements of resistance within them. Critical questions such as "*Mengapa kau bodoh?*" and "*Apa makna cinta?*" show an awareness of gender injustice. The line "*Persetan semua doktrin dan juga dogma*" is a form of resistance against values that perpetuate violence against women. Ideologically, these lyrics are a critique of the social construct of patriarchy, which places women as inferior and men as superior. This view is in line with Raharjo's thinking in Anggreni (2014), which explains that the ideal image of women in patriarchal culture is obedient, gentle, and must not exceed men.

The song '*Ibu*' by Pangalo! shows resistance to the patriarchal ideology that considers women as having the role of serving their husbands. This sentiment often appears in patriarchal culture, namely the well, the kitchen, and the bed (Wiyono, 2020). The verse "*Tuhan bukan bapa, bukan pula ibu, kita sama saja*" depicts a form of resistance against the system and religion that are considered to be the cause of inequality between men and

women. This shows an effort to dismantle the discourse of male domination and encourage change towards gender equality.

In the local context, Pangalo's ethnic background, which comes from the Batak tribe, gives additional meaning to the social criticism in this song. Batak society recognizes a patrilineal kinship system that places men as heirs to the clan and determinants of social status. A study by Saputri et al., (2021) explains that this system places women in a subordinate position and often requires them to maintain the honor of the family, even at the expense of their safety or freedom. In this context, Pangalo, which in the Batak language means “rebel,” becomes a symbol of resistance against a value system that normalizes violence and gender inequality.

Thus, the results of this study not only represent a textual analysis of the song “*Ibu*,” but also expand the global discourse on how music functions as an arena for the production of meaning, resistance, and the formation of gender awareness. Academically, these findings contribute to the study of women's representation in popular culture by showing that Indonesian independent music can be a form of social criticism against the patriarchy that is still strong both locally and globally. Practically, these results can be used as a basis for media literacy and gender equality advocacy in the digital space through musical works.

CONCLUSION

The lyrics song ‘*Ibu*’ by Pangalo! provide an in-depth representation of how domestic violence is so easily experienced by women in Indonesia after marriage. Deep-rooted dogma, social values, and cultural norms not only perpetuate domestic violence, but also make it difficult for women to escape from violent situations. Gender stereotypes that women must be submissive and accept all of their husband's decisions, even when they take the form of violence, reinforce the power imbalance within the household. Additionally, the view that the household must be preserved for the sake of the children and the hope that the husband will change in the future often leads many women to choose to endure and resign themselves to a situation filled with suffering.

These findings show that patriarchal discourse still operates subtly through the construction of dogmas and doctrines that normalize violence against women. Therefore, research on domestic violence needs to be further developed to provide an empirical basis for the government in formulating policies for the protection of women and children. In addition to playing a role in the realm of public policy, studies such as this are also important in raising public awareness through media literacy and popular culture. In a broader context, this research is in line with the global trend of analyzing music discourse in the digital age, where music not only functions as an aesthetic expression but also as a space for social representation and criticism of gender and social inequality.

Based on these findings, this study recommends strengthening gender-based critical media education in both formal and non-formal educational institutions. This education needs to be directed at equipping the public with the ability to read, interpret, and critically analyze representations of violence in popular culture in a reflective and empathetic manner. In addition, it is important to develop collaboration between academics, artists, and gender activists to create music that is not only aesthetically pleasing but also serves as a medium for advocacy and social awareness building on the issue of domestic violence. This cross-

disciplinary collaboration can be realized through workshops on gender equality-themed music production, collaborative research between campuses and artistic communities, and music-based public education programs.

Further research should also focus on developing empathy in popular music, examining how narrative, performative, and aesthetic elements in music can serve as a medium for collective healing for victims of violence and a means of social advocacy. On the other hand, institutional support from the government and cultural institutions is needed to expand creative expression spaces that are oriented towards gender equality, for example through thematic research grants, music festivals, or arts-based public campaigns. Thus, music can function not only as a means of entertainment, but also as a reflective medium that fosters social empathy and encourages cultural transformation towards a more just society.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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