



## SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF FATHERLESS IN THE LYRICS OF THE SONG "NINA" BY .FEAST

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the representation of the meaning of "fatherless" in the lyrics of the song "Nina" by the Indonesian music group .Feast using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis approach. The focus of this study is to identify linguistic and symbolic signs that reflect the experience of losing a father figure, both physically and emotionally. The method used is descriptive qualitative analysis with a three-level semiotic approach: denotation, connotation, and myth. The primary data in the form of the lyrics of the song "Nina" are analyzed based on Barthes' sign system to reveal the social construction and ideology contained in the musical text. The results of the analysis show that the song lyrics convey the reality of fatherlessness as a complex personal experience and imply a critique of patriarchal norms and modern family structures. These findings enrich the body of cultural communication studies, particularly in understanding how popular music functions as a representational space for sensitive social issues. This study contributes to connecting semiotic studies with contemporary social issues in the context of Indonesian music culture.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Music has long been an expressive medium, serving not only as entertainment but also as a means of conveying social messages, cultural criticism, and personal reflection. In the context of modern society, music often represents complex social experiences, including the loss or breakdown of family relationships. The phenomenon of "fatherlessness," or the absence of a father figure, is a prominent issue in the discourse on family psychology and social dynamics, due to its significant implications for children's emotional development and identity (Sabrina, 2023). According to 2023 data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the increasing rate of divorce and fatherless families is a trend that impacts the well-being of the younger generation.

The phenomenon of "fatherlessness" refers not only to the physical absence of a father but also to the absence of emotional involvement, which can influence a child's personality structure. In patriarchal cultures like Indonesia, the role of fathers is often reduced to that of breadwinners, while children's emotional needs receive less attention. Therefore, it is important to understand how the social construction of the father's role is represented in popular culture, one of which is through music.

One musical work that explicitly addresses this theme is the song "Nina" by the band .Feast. Released on the album *Membangun dan Menghancurkan* (Building and Destroying) in 2024, this song captured

public attention with its touching lyrical narrative, conveying a child's emotional experience of the absence of a father. As an independent music group, .Feast is known for boldly addressing social and political issues in their work. The song "Nina" can be read as a cultural text that represents the dynamics of father-child relationships within the framework of modernity and changing masculinities.

From a semiotic perspective, songs can be analyzed as systems of signs rich with meaning. Roland Barthes's theory is a relevant approach because it explains three layers of meaning within the text: denotation, connotation, and myth. Through this approach, the lyrics of "Nina" are not only understood literally but also as an articulation of cultural and ideological meanings about family, gender roles, and social expectations of fatherhood.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the meaning of "fatherless" contained in the lyrics of "Nina" through Barthes's semiotic approach. This research is important because it can provide an in-depth understanding of how personal social experiences are represented in the medium of music, as well as how cultural texts play a role in shaping discourse on the role of fathers in contemporary Indonesian society.

### **Semiotics**

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and how meaning is produced and communicated in society. As explained by (Hoed, 2014), semiotics is the study of signs in human life. This means that everything present in life is seen as a sign, something that must be given meaning. A semiotic approach allows for a deeper examination of the meaning of texts, including song lyrics.

The sign is the basic unit in semiotics, consisting of the signifier, the physical form of the sign that can be sensed, and the signified, the mental concept or meaning represented by the sign. Within a sign system, paradigmatic relationships are recognized, which are selective relationships between signs that can be substituted for each other, and syntagmatic relationships, which are combinatorial relationships between signs in a sequence.

The significance of this research lies in understanding how the experience of fatherlessness is transmitted, represented, and interpreted through the medium of music. Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines semiotics, psychology, and music studies, this research aims to explore the complexity of personal experiences expressed in the work .Feast.

This study goes beyond the interpretive level, but aims to contribute academically to understanding how music functions as a space for negotiating meaning, identity, and traumatic experiences. Beyond mere textual analysis, this research aims to open up a dialogue about family dynamics, constructions of masculinity, and the process of healing through artistic expression.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative literature approach with a semiotic analysis method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective of uncovering the deeper meaning of the signs contained in the lyrics of the song "Nina" by .Feast. According to Creswell (2022), a qualitative approach is suitable for research aimed at understanding the meanings attached by individuals or groups to a social or human issue.

The semiotic analysis used in this study is Roland Barthes's. Semiotics is the discipline that studies signs, namely symbols or signs found in society. Semiotics studies the systems, rules, or conventions that enable signs to have meaning in society. Barthes developed semiotics at two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. He also considered another aspect of signifiers, namely myth, which he argued is at the second level of signification. (Hidayat, et al., 2022: 401)

The object of this research is the lyrics of the song "Nina" by .Feast, released in 2024 as part of the album "Membangun dan rusak." The lyrics of this song were chosen because they tell the story of a girl's experience growing up without the presence of a father figure, which is relevant to the focus of the research on the meaning of fatherless.

## **3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Context of the Song "Nina"**

One of the tracks with a prominent lyrical approach in the album "Membangun dan Menghancurkan" from .FEAST in 2024 is "Nina". Nina tells the story of a girl named Nina who grew up without the presence of a father figure. FEAST is an indie music group known for lyrics nuanced with social criticism. This is

their first time raising the theme of "fatherless", Nina is one proof that .FEAST can relax with even complex themes, presenting the narrative of "fatherless" with an intimate and personal approach. Nina is a leitmotif character who acts as a general representation of children who grow up without a father. Nina begins with the first slow music. The narrator shows the situation of Nina's contemplation of the character who thinks about her father. FEAST combines this narrative with empathy, depicting how this character feels and how her values become. In general, Nina is a life story about Nina's life system colored by questions about identity, longing for a protective figure, and efforts to understand the reasons behind her father's absence. In the context of contemporary Indonesian music, the song "Nina" is one of the works that boldly addresses the theme of the absence of a father figure, a topic often considered taboo to discuss openly in society. .FEAST successfully packaged this complex theme in a compelling musical format while simultaneously conveying a powerful social message.

Barthes introduced the notions of "anchorage" and "relay" to explore the interaction between text and image. Originally designed to examine advertising and photography, this framework also applies to studying song lyrics, particularly as they relate to visual elements (such as music videos) and accompanying auditory components (such as melody and instrumentation). "Anchorage" suggests a scenario in which text limits or guides the interpretation of an image, while "relay" describes a context in which text and image work together to enhance meaning. (Barthes, 1967)

Various semiotic elements, both narrative and visual, play a crucial role in conveying messages, constructing connotative meanings, and creating myths that can influence how audiences interpret a text or media. Understanding a text or symbol cannot be separated from its underlying cultural and social context, as hidden meanings are often shaped by prevailing social constructs and ideologies. (Sawitri & Sazali, 2024) Roland Barthes expanded the study of semiotics by introducing the concepts of myth, denotation, and connotation. Denotation is the literal meaning of a sign, while connotation is the associative, cultural, or ideological meaning (Barthes, 2010). Barthes also proposed the concept of myth as a second-level semiotic system that functions to naturalize cultural and ideological values. In the context of analyzing the song "Nina," Barthes's approach allows for an examination of the denotative and connotative meanings of the phrase "fatherless" and the myths it contains.

#### **Denotative Meaning: Physical Absence in Family Narratives**

Denotative meaning refers to the literal or most basic meaning of the linguistic signs present in the lyrics. Denotative meaning can be found in the direct meaning of the words and phrases used. In the case of the song "Nina," the denotative meaning must be described based on the circumstances. In other words, the song openly talks about a father who has a relationship with his child, but whose physical teachings can often be different and who ignores them.

Denotatively, the lyrics of "Nina" describe a father who works away from home and is rarely present in his child's daily life. This reflects a common phenomenon in Indonesian society, especially among the working class, where fathers must travel to support the family's finances. Lyrics such as "one to five years quickly unnoticed" illustrate the reality of a physically distant relationship that is maintained through symbolic communication. (Larasati, 2022)

#### **Connotative Meaning: Fractured Emotional Relationships**

##### **Connotative Meaning: Fractured Emotional Relationships**

In Barthes's thinking, the relationship between a sign and the feelings, values, and cultural experiences of its users already forms a connotative meaning. In the context of the song "Nina," the connotative meaning of "fatherless" goes deeper than simply the physical absence of a father, but also concerns the social construction of a father's role in modern Indonesia. (Nathaniel & Sannie, 2020)

The connotation of "fatherless" in this song carries an emotional complexity related to changing family structures. Furthermore, the song also reflects the struggle of a figure who struggles to provide for his family. However, it is important to understand that the demands of a breadwinner can potentially create emotional distance, leading to a child missing and lacking a father figure on a daily basis.

At the connotative level, the lyrics reflect the complex emotions of a child longing for a father figure. The song presents an empathetic narrative from the perspective of a father who recognizes his absence and tries to compensate with promises, gifts, and encouraging words. This also critiques traditional gender roles that emphasize the father as the sole provider. Within Barthes's framework, this connotation reveals how the text implies unequal social relations and emotional emptiness within the patriarchal family structure (Barthes, 2010; Nathaniel & Sannie, 2020).

### The Meaning of Myth: The Naturalness of Fatherlessness

The highest level of meaning in Barthes's semiotics is myth, which refers to a system of values and ideologies that have become naturalized in society and are therefore considered universal truths. In the context of the song "Nina," the myth of "fatherlessness" is closely linked to patriarchal ideology and the social construction of the ideal family.

Barthes argues that myths function to normalize prevailing ideologies in society. Myths present certain values and beliefs as natural and universal, even though they are social and historical constructions. When examining the song's lyrics, Barthes's concept of myth allows us to understand how the lyrics can reinforce or challenge societal myths related to various social issues, such as ideas about family and the role of fathers. (Ariffananda & Wijaksono, 2023)

The myth level demonstrates how certain values and ideologies are normalized in culture through musical narratives. This song both reproduces and deconstructs three dominant myths:

- The myth of the father as the primary breadwinner.
- The myth of the division of rigid gender roles between fathers and mothers.
- The myth that fatherlessness is a natural consequence of modernity.

With lyrics like "meeting again there, I'm still the same" and "an imperfect journey," this song questions standards of masculinity and raises a new awareness that a father's role cannot be reduced solely to material aspects. The findings of the overall meaning of the song's lyrics are presented in the following table.

Lyric	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Myth Meaning
Grow up and find your calling	A father's direct message to his son to develop into a better person and find his purpose in life.	An expression of love and hope from a father who feels unable to be with his child in person, thus offering advice for his future life.	Reflects the cultural concept of the father's role as a provider of advice and guidance in life, even though he is not always physically present.
Protection from the "evil world"	A father's desire to protect his son from the evils of the world.	A father's deep concern for his child's future, along with the helplessness of not being able to always be by his side to protect him.	Reinforces the masculine stereotype of the father as the protector of the family, while acknowledging the limitations of fulfilling this role.
"Wandering Far Away" and "When you grow up you'll understand"	A father who goes far away and hopes his son will understand his reasons someday.	The sacrifice or necessity that forces a father to leave the family, in the hope that the child will understand that this is not done out of indifference.	Depicts the concept of sacrifice by parents (especially fathers) who must work hard or make sacrifices for the family's future, even if they are temporarily separated.
"If I leave early"	The possibility of the father dying before his son reaches adulthood.	Awareness of mortality and the fear of leaving a child unprepared for life.	Addresses universal themes of death and the legacy left by parents, as well as the fear of leaving the family unstable.
"An imperfect journey"	An acknowledgment that the father-son relationship is flawed and conflicted.	Deep regret for mistakes in raising a child and an absence that may have hurt the child's feelings.	Reflects the reality that no family relationship is perfect, and the importance of forgiveness and understanding in the father-child relationship.

Source: Researcher Processed Data, 2025

Overall, the analysis shows that the song "Nina" is not only a personal expression but also a social representation of the reality of the modern family. Using a Barthesian approach, this research uncovers the ideological dimensions hidden within the song's lyrics and opens up a space for critical discussion about changing family structures, gender roles, and the need for emotional presence in parent-child relationships.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that the song "Nina" by .Feast represents the phenomenon of fatherlessness as a multidimensional experience encompassing not only the physical absence of a father but also the emotional and symbolic distance in the parent-child relationship. Using Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, the lyrical analysis reveals three main layers of meaning: denotative meaning, which is the literal depiction of a father working away from home and only connecting with his child through indirect communication; connotative meaning, which is the expression of emotion, regret, and hope that highlights the vulnerability of the father-child relationship in a modern society that demands specific gender roles; and mythological meaning, which is the ideological narrative that has been naturalized in culture, such as the myth of the father as the primary breadwinner, the rigid division of gender roles, and the normalization of father absence as a consequence of modernity.

This song not only expresses personal social trauma but also opens up a space for criticism of social constructs that suppress and neglect children's emotional needs. "Nina" artistically presents identity negotiation and the healing of psychological wounds through the medium of popular music, which, within Barthes's framework, can be read as a form of resistance to the dominant narratives in Indonesian patriarchal culture.

Academically, this research contributes to the study of cultural communication, popular music, and family studies in contemporary society. Music is positioned not merely as an entertainment text, but as a discursive space that produces and distributes significant social meanings. This research also emphasizes the relevance of Barthes's semiotic approach in reading works of art rich in meaning and social critique.

Future studies could develop a multimodal approach by combining visual analysis of music videos and audience responses to the "fatherless" narrative on digital platforms. This is crucial for further exploring how social experiences are constructed, accepted, or challenged in the realm of popular culture.

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