Takut, Bertaut, and Runtuh: Analizing The Authenticity of Autobiographical Lyrics and Their Relation With Youth Reception

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Abstract
Previous studies showed that love has become an eternal theme in pop music. But since the early 2000s, new themes with negative sentiments such as pain, despair, fear, and sadness have emerged in pop music. Along with this phenomenon, recent pop music offers poetic lyrics instead of cliché lyrics. What makes them more interesting is, some of the lyrics are autobiographical. This study aims to analyze the authenticity of autobiographical lyrics and their relation to young listeners' reception. The researchers use three songs as the research object: Takut by Idgitaf, Bertaut by Nadin Amizah, and Runtuh by Feby Patri and Fiersa Besari.

This qualitative research uses the lyrics of those songs and questionnaire results as its data. The questionnaire respondents are young listeners between 18 and 30 years old who live in different villages and cities in Indonesia with various social economic and educational backgrounds. The collected data are approached using Frith’s thoughts on lyrics and pop music in Taking Pop Music Seriously (2016) and Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music (1996) and also Hoggarts' thoughts on mass culture (2017) in The Uses of Literacy. Analysis of the works of Idgitaf, Nadin Amizah, Feby Patri, and Fiersa Besari shows that all of them have distinct and unique songwriting skills. They also show consistency in choosing the theme song, including the three songs used as research objects. Out of 64 respondents, 56.3% claim that knowing a song is an autobiographical work does not change their opinion and feelings toward the song. However, the result of the questionnaire shows that young listeners feel connected to song lyrics that represent their feelings.

Keywords: Autobiographical, lyrics, pop, music, Indonesia
INTRODUCTION

Peatman says that all famous pop music talk about romantic love—be it happy love, tragic love, or love and sex (Frith, 2016). Considering that recurring theme, no wonder that most pop music has cliché lyrics. Songwriters compete to meet a standard that guarantees a good market reception. Etzkorn says that pop music songwriters are no longer creative workers; they are music businessmen (Frith, 2016). Some music critics believe that the banality of pop music’s lyrics is not a problem because listeners enjoy the music of pop music, instead of the lyrics. Other critics who believe that words matter argue that pop music does not only reflect the emotions of its songwriters; it provides the listeners with words to express their own emotions (Griffiths, 2003; Frith, 2016). As Frith put it,

*My conclusion from this is that song words matter most, as words, when they are not part of an auteurial unity, when they are still open to interpretation - not just by their singers, but by their listeners too* (Frith, 2016: 226)

Interestingly, in the early 2000s, pop music offers fresh themes such as "inspiration", "pain", "despair" (Henard & Christian, 2014), "anger", "disgust", "fear", "sad", and “vigilance” (Napier & Shamir, 2018). Along with the phenomenon, more and more pop songs use poetic lyrics instead of cliché ones. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, poetic means ‘having the quality of poetry’. Through carefully chosen and arrange words that consider sound and rhythm, poetic lyrics create a specific emotional response to their listeners.

Furthermore, some famous songwriters imply that their poetic lyrics are autobiographical—a statement that implicitly claims the authenticity of their works. As a product of mass culture, authenticity in pop music has always been questionable. Hoggarts argues about forced intimacy in mass culture and says, "The singer is reaching millions, but pretends he is reaching only you" (Hoggarts, 2017). About authenticity in lyrics and the listeners’ reception, Frith says:

*First, it is important to remember that the distinction between "real" and "unreal" lyrics is, at least in part, arbitrary. Songs, after all, are not mostly general statements of sociological or psychological truth (as even Levine sometimes seems to imply); they are more likely to be examples of personal rhetoric … The question becomes, in other words, why some sorts of words are heard as real or unreal, and to understand this we have to understand that how words work in song depends not just on what is said, the verbal content, but also on how it is said-on the type of language used and its rhetorical significance; on the kind of voice in which it is spoken. (Frith, 1996: 163-4)*

Based on Frith’s thoughts on lyrics and pop music in *Taking Pop Music Seriously* (2016) and *Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music* (1996) and also Hoggarts’s thought on mass culture (2017) in *The Uses of Literacy*, this article aims to analyze the authenticity of autobiographical lyrics and their relation with youth reception.

There are a lot of studies on English pop music lyrics produced between 1960 to 2010 that have been
conducted in America and Britain (Christenson et al., 2019; Griffiths, 2003; Harold, 1972; Napier & Shamir, 2018; North et al., 2021). In order to provide new findings on the current trend in Indonesia, this article analyzes Indonesian pop songs produced in the last five years. Those songs are *Takut* (Scared) by Brigita Sriulina Beru Meliala or Idgitaf, *Bertaut* (Bound) by Nadin Amizah, and *Runtuh* (Falling Appart) by Feby Putri Nilam Cahyani and Fiersa Besari.

*Takut, Bertaut, and Runtuh* have become objects in many studies in Indonesia. Scholars analyze their stylistic device, deixis, semiotics, and usage as teaching material in vocational schools as well as a therapy media for children with divorced parents (Yuliani & Muflihah, 2022; Damayanti, 2022; Setiawati et al., 2021; Nirmala & Anwar, 2020; Cahyani, 2022, Andini et al. 2023, Salzabila & Sudaryanto, 2022, Wafa, Purwani, & Malik, 2020). The researchers have not found any study that analyzes their authenticity and their relation to youth reception.

**METHOD**

Creswell (in Sugiarti et al., 2020: 19) discusses characteristics of qualitative research such as using data in the form of written words focusing on the participant’s perspective, and framing human behavior and its underlying context. Based on the explanation, this study will be best conducted as qualitative research.

Considering that teenagers favor pop music (Husna & Rinjani, 2022), this study will use young people between 18-30 years old as the respondents. Moreover, the quarter-life crisis, the theme in *Takut* commonly happens in this age period. This study hypothesizes that young people anywhere can experience quarter-life crises, conflict with mothers, and stressed-out feelings caused by others’ demands to stay strong. Therefore, the researchers do not limit the respondents by social class, educational background, domicile, and sex. The primary data of this study is the lyrics of *Takut, Bertaut,* and *Runtuh* and the questionnaire response. The data will be approached using Frith’s thoughts on lyrics and pop music in *Taking Pop Music Seriously* (2016) and *Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music* (1996) and also Hoggart’s thoughts on mass culture (2017) in *The Uses of Literacy*. The researchers also read other references about poetic lyrics, pop music, and mass culture.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Analyzing Song lyrics**

Lyrics are an important part of a song, through which songwriters can express their ideas. The carefully chosen and arranged words help listeners to understand the meaning of a song and feel entertained (Putra & Wafa, 2021). Mooney (in Frith, 1989) states that pop song lyrics reflect the emotional needs of the period in which they were created. Goddard, Pollock, and Fudger (in Frith, 1989) also say that lyrics constantly echo and reinforce values approved by society. A song becomes popular when it fulfills a popular need. Hence, the lyrics of pop songs change over time (Frith, 1989).

*Idgitaf and Takut*
Idgitaf or Brigitta Sriulina Beru Meliala was born in 2001 as the third child of four siblings. She has fallen in love with music since she was a child but only when she was in high school, she started her band. A music project at high school boosts her lyrics writing skills. She initiates her career in the music industry by covering songs on YouTube and Instagram, but TikTok is the media that brings her fame.

In 2020, Idgitaf’s first single, Hal Indah Butuh Waktu Untuk Datang (Beautiful Things Take Time) includes 50 viral songs on Spotify and she also wins Best of Performers in TikTok Awards Indonesia. Her second song, Terpikat Senyummu (Captivated by Your Smile) is also a love song. Unlike her previous singles, Idgitaf’s next two songs, which are released in the following years, Berlagak Bahagia (Pretending to be Happy) and Takut (Scared).

In an interview, Idgitaf shares that Takut expresses her anxiety when turning twenty. She writes the lyrics of the song on her birthday, as she contemplates by a beach. Takut receives positive reviews since it represents typical anxiety among young people.

In 2022, Idgitaf released a mini album entitled Semoga Sembuh (Get Well) consisting of five songs with a quarter-life crisis theme, including Takut. The album wins two nominations at Indonesia Music Awards. In her freshly started career, Idgitaf shows consistency in writing about the quarter-life crisis. Besides, she often writes based on her personal experience. Her other single, Satu-satu (one by one), tells about how Idgitaf deals with her childhood trauma. Through easy-listening music and modest words, Idgitaf can honestly tell her stories to her listeners.

Below are the original lyrics of Takut and its translation.

**Sudah di kepala dua**
Harus mulai dari mana?
Ambisiku bergejolak, antusias tak karuan
Banyak mimpimu-mimpimu yang kan kukejar

**Been in my twenties**
Where should I start?
My agitating ambition, my careless enthusiasm
Dreams I’d like to achieve

**Likli perjalanan**
Ku terjebak sendirian
Tumbuh dari kebaikan, bangkit dari kesalah
Berusaha pendamkan kenyataan bahwa

The twist and turns of the journey
I am trapped alone
Growing from kindness, learning from the mistakes
Trying to put out the fact that I’m

*Takut tambah dewasa*
Takut aku kecewa
Takut tak seindah yang kukira
Takut tambah dewasa
Takut aku kecewa
Takut tak sekuat yang kukira

*Scared of growing up*
Scared of getting disappointed
Scared that it won’t be as beautiful as I thought
Scared of growing up
Scared of getting disappointed
Scared that I won’t be as strong as I thought

**Aku tetap bernafas**
Meski sering tercekat
Aku tetap bernafas
Meski aku tak mersa bebas

**I’m still breathing**
Though sometimes get suffocated
I’m still breathing
Though I feel captivated

May your steps be light
May your heart be free
May your soul be free
Hm-hm

Mid of twenty-five
What's next?
buried dream sacrifices my resting time
I don't know what will I achieve

Source: Musixmatch
Songwriter: Brigita Sriulina Beru Meliala
Lyrics Takut © Pt. Massive Music Ent., Massive Music Entertainment

Note: The researchers bold some parts of the original lyrics to show the lost rhymes due to translation.

About Nadin Amizah and Bertaut

Nadin Amizah was born in May 2000. Even though she wins third place in a talent show “Social Media Sensation” on a national TV channel in 2016, people start to know her when the song she features Dipha Barus wins The Best Ballad Song in 2017.

Until 2019, Nadin has released four singles Rumpang (Emptiness), Sorai (Cheer), Star, and Seperti Tulang (Like Bones). In 2020, on her birthday, Nadin releases her mini album entitled Selamat Ulang Tahun (Happy Birthday). In the following year, she releases another album entitled Kalah Bertaruh (Lost the Bet). Apart from writing and singing her songs, Nadin also collaborates with other musicians.

Instead of delivering a love theme like most pop music do, a lot of Nadin’s songs deliver grim and murky theme like wound and loss. Still, her songs receive positive feedback from young Indonesian. Rumpang wins the Best Folk/Country/Ballad Song and Nadin herself wins the Best New Comer from Indonesia Music Awards in 2019.

Nadin’s poetic style is consistently shown in her works. In Seperti Tulang, Nadin writes:

May your heart be free
May your soul be free
Hm-hm

You are still breathing
Though sometimes get suffocated
You are still breathing
Kecil, seorang penipu mahir
Sehingga tak ada lagi tanya
Apakah kau tak apa
Menertawakan rintih
Sampai ragamu lupah
Terbiasa leluh

Little, like a skillful trickster
No more questions
Are you okay
Laughing at weeping
Till you forgetting
Getting used to exhaustion

She even writes poetic titles for her works, for example, Hormat Kepada Angin (A Tribute to the Wind) and Sebuah Tarian yang Tak Kunjung Selesai (A Never-Finished Dance).

From several interviews and her family's social media posts, Nadin confesses that some of her songs are inspired by her life experience. Her parents were parted when Nadin was little. While Mendarah (Bleeds) is dedicated to her father, Bertaut is dedicated to her mother. Even the latter song wins the Best Folk/Country/Ballad Song.

Below are the original lyrics of Bertaut and their translation.

Bun, hidup berjalan seperti bajingan
Seperti landak yang tak punya teman
Ia menggonggong bak suara hujan
Dan kau pangeranku, mengambil peran

Mom, life goes on like a bastard
like a lonely hedgehog
It barks like the rain
And you are my prince, playing the role

Bun, kalau saat hancur ku disayang
Apalagi saat ku jadi juara
Saat tak tahu arah kau di sana
Menjadi gogah saat ku tak bisa

Mom, if you still love me when I'm broken
You'd still love when I become a champion
You'll be there when I'm lost
You'll be brave when I'm not

*Sedikit kujelaskan tentangku dan kamu
Agar seisi dunia tahu
Keras kepalaku sama denganmu
Caraku marah, caraku tersenyum
Seerti detak jantung yang bertaut
Nyawaku nyala karena dengannya

*I'll explain a little about me and you
So that the whole world knows
I'm stubborn, just like you
The way I got angry, the way I smile
Like bounded heartbeats
My soul flares up when I'm with you

**Aku masih ada sampai di sini
Melihatmu kuat setengah mati
Seerti detak jantung yang bertaut
Nyawaku nyala karena dengannya

**I'm still here today
Finding you standing still
Like bounded heartbeats
My soul flares up when I'm with you

Bun, aku masih tak mengerti banyak hal
Semuanya berenang di kepala
Dan kau dan semua yang kau tahu tentangnya
Menjadi jawab saat ku bertanya

Mom, I'm clueless bout a lot of things
Everything swims inside my head
You and everything you know
Be the answer when I ask

Repeat * and **

Semoga lama hidupmu di sini
Melihatku berjuang sampai akhir
Seerti detak jantung yang bertaut
Nyawaku nyala karena dengannya

May you live long
Watching me fighting till the end
Like bounded heartbeats
My soul flares up when I'm with you

Source: Musixmatch
Songwriters: Nadin Amizah/ Mikha Angelo Brahmantryo/ Zulqi L. Ramandha

Note: The researchers bold some parts of the original lyrics to show the lost rhymes due to translation.

About Feby Nilam, Fiersa Besari, and Runtu

Feby Putri Nilam Cahyani was born in 2000 in Makassar as a seventh daughter. Feby started covering songs when she was in high school. Her first single, Halu (a commonly used shortened term for hallucination), that is released in 2019, is inspired by schizophrenia patients. Only in three weeks since its release on YouTube, Halu has been listened to by 3.5 million people. Afterward, Feby starts her tour of 23 cities.

Apart from the positive reception towards Halu, Feby’s fame soars three years after, when she writes and sings Runtu with a famous singer, Fiersa Besari. Even the song wins the Best Folk/Country/Ballad Song from Indonesia Music Awards in 2022.

In the same year, Feby releases her first album, Riuh consisting of six new songs and four old singles. In general, Riuh expresses Feby’s anxiety about being a nomad. The ten track lists are written by Feby, but the music is a collaboration with other musicians.

Feby is widely known for her unusual lyrics. Her unique style is also shown in Usik (disturbed). Feby begins the song with sentences in an unfamiliar language.

Tusuk halt gnay natagni gnajrenem.
Tudasret uk ini gnaur tagnah malad.
Tural halt gnay lah kaugnem.

Those are Indonesian sentences that are written and read backward—a similar speaking style used in Malang, a city in East Java, Indonesia. The “translation” of those sentences can be read in the next verse

Tersesak beriring kabut
Menguak hal yang t’lah larut
Dalam hangat ruang ini kutersudut
Menerjang ingatan yang tlah kusut

Crowded alongside the mist
Unveil the dissolved things
In the warmth of this room, I’m cornered
Crushing into tangled memories

Fiersa Besari is a talented musician and author who wins a lot of awards. In 2019, he wins IKAPI Award for Rookie of the Year. Then, in the following year, he wins Top Male Singer of the Year from Billboard Indonesia Music Awards.

Fiersa started his career in 2012, but he becomes famous seven years later when his song Pelukku untuk Pelikmu (My Hug for Your Confusion) is chosen to be the soundtrack of a successful movie, Imperfect: Karir, Cinta, dan Timbangan (Imperfect: career, love, and weigh scale).

Most of Fiersa’s songs talk about love. Fiersa’s honest and modest words and cheerful music makes his works lovable. Below is an example from his song Celengan Rindu (Saving My Longing):

Ingin ku bakar dia yang sering
Mention mentionan denganmu di twitter
Namun kau selalu menyakinkanku
Ku tumbukan rasa percaya  
Bukan rasa curiga  
I want to burn him down  
The guy who mentions you a lot on  
Twitter  
But you ensure me  
You breed trust  
Instead of suspicion

**Tak perlu khawatir, ku hanya terluka**  
Terbiasa 'tuk pura-pura tertawa  
Namun bolehkah s'kali saja ku menangis?  
Sebelum kembali membohongi diri

**Don't worry, I'm just wounded**  
I'm getting used to pretending to laugh  
But may I cry, just once  
before lying to myself again

Ketika kau lelah  
Berhentilah dulu  
Beri ruang, beri waktu

When you are tired  
Rest for a while  
Give yourself some space and time

Repeat * and **

Kita hanyalah manusia yang terluka  
Terbiasa 'tuk pura-pura tertawa  
Namun bolehkah sekali saja ku menangis?  
Ku tak ingin lagi membohongi diri  
Ku ingin belajar menerima diri

We are just wounded humans  
Getting used to pretending to laugh  
But may I cry just once?  
I don’t want to lie to myself again  
I want to accept myself

Source: Musixmatch  
Songwriters: Fiersa Besari/ Feby Putri  
Nilam Cahyani  
Lirik Takut © Pt. Massive Music Ent.,  
Massive Music Entertainment

Note: The researchers bold some parts of the  
original lyrics to show the lost rhymes due to  
translation.

**The analysis of questionnaire response**

Out of 64 respondents who participate in the "Listeners' Acceptance of Autobiographical Song Lyrics" questionnaire, only 18.8% (12 people) are male. 81.3% (52 people) of the respondents are between 20-30 years old. The rest of them are 18-19
years old. Most of the respondents are still pursuing or have completed their education at the university level. Only 23.4% (15 people) of respondents are still in high school or do not continue their education to university level.

Respondents live in different municipalities and districts in Indonesia. Although the majority of respondents came from Java Island, 10.94% of respondents (7 people) came from Sulawesi Island, 3.1% of respondents (2 people) came from Sumatra Island, and 1.56% of respondents (1 person) respectively from Madura Island, Bali Island, and Ambon Island. There are even 3.1% of respondents (2 people) currently living abroad (Hong Kong and Malaysia).

Regarding the question about the frequency of listening to music, only 9.4% of respondents (6 people) answer that they rarely listen to music and 3.1% of respondents (2 people) answer that they rarely hear music. 42.2% of respondents (27 people) admit that they listen to music every day and 45.3% of respondents (29 people) listened to music almost every day. According to the result, three activities mostly conduct while listening to music are: relaxing, cleaning the house, and studying or doing homework. In addition, the genre most popular with respondents is pop music.

The following is a table showing respondents’ knowledge and opinions on the research objects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Songs</th>
<th>Respondents who know</th>
<th>Respondents who feel related with lyrics</th>
<th>Respondents who think the songs have autobiographical lyrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Takut</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
<td>20.3% (13)</td>
<td>70.3% (45)</td>
<td>Not included in the question nare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertaut</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
<td>40.6% (26)</td>
<td>62.5% (40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runtuh</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td>67.2% (43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 45 respondents who claim to feel related to the lyrics of Takut, 11.1% (5 people) are male. There is no dominant domicile and educational background among 45 respondents. Both I, an undergraduate student living in Ternate, South Sulawesi, and ATA, a postgraduate student living in Surabaya, East Java agree that Takut describes the quarter-life crisis they are experiencing.

Surprisingly, 22.2% (10 people) of the respondents who claim to feel related to Takut are younger than 20 years old. RO, a high school girl who lives in Depok, Java, says that she feels the anxiety of growing older because she realizes that her parents also get older. She feels that she ought to achieve something like her other friends, but at the same time, she feels that her family’s financial situation prevents her from moving forward and that her parents’ expectations stress her out.

Meanwhile, out of 40 respondents who feel related to the lyrics of Bertaut, 25% (10 people) are under 20 years old. ANHR, a respondent who lives in Gowa, South Sulawesi, says that she understands the lyrics about a stubborn mother and her stubborn daughter. YFA, a postgraduate student between 20-30-year-old who lives in Bangkalan, Madura, says that as a child who talks
about her problems to her parents, she feels very connected to the Bertaut.

There is no dominant domicile and educational background among 40 respondents who feel related to Bertaut. Interestingly, 10% (4 people) out of 40 respondents are male. DA, a male respondent who lives in Cimahi, West Java, says that the lyrics of Bertaut make him feel connected since he also has a close friend with whom he tells everything. H, a male respondent, who lives in Surabaya, East Java says that he feels connected with Bertaut since he is not open to his parents. The lyrics make him able to imagine the experience of sharing things with his parents.

Out of the 43 respondents who claim to feel related to Runtuh, 27.9% (12 people) are under 20 years old. L, a female respondent who lives in Semarang, admits that she feels connected to this song because the people around her often remind her to be grateful when she feels down. L says that she isn’t ungrateful, she is just not ready to accept reality. GA, a female respondent who graduated high school and currently lives in Hong Kong, answers that the lyric of Runtuh made her realize it is fine to cry sometimes. Crying isn’t the same as being weak.

13.9% (6 people) of the respondents who claim to feel related to the lyrics of Runtuh are male. MA, a male respondent between 20-30-years-old who lives in Kampung Sukamaju, Bogor says that the song reminds him of his "collapsed" relationship. While TSP, a male respondent who lives in Bantul, DIY, says that Runtuh accurately describes the ups and downs of life he is currently experiencing. The results of the questionnaire for this song also did not show domicile or educational background.

51.6% of respondents (33 people) say that they first heard Bertaut on Spotify and YouTube. 57.8% of respondents (37 people) also say that they heard Runtuh for the first time on Spotify and YouTube. However, 46.9% of respondents (30 people) say that they first heard Takut from social media such as Instagram and TikTok.

In contrast to the initial hypothesis of this study, 56.3% of respondents (36 people) state that their opinions and feelings about a song do not change after knowing that the lyrics of the song are autobiographical. NYA, a female respondent under 20 years old who lives in Bekasi says that when she listens to a song, she enjoys the music, not the lyrics. WH, a male respondent who lives in Surabaya, and F a female respondent who lives in Bekasi explain that sadness and fragility are universal feelings, so, naturally, a lot of people experience them.

43.8% of respondents (28 people) say that their feelings change after learning that a song is autobiographical. A, a female respondent with an undergraduate educational background who lives in Ambon, and N, a high school girl who lives in Yogyakarta say that they feel relieved to know that there are people who feel what they feel. MIAW, a male respondent older than 20 years with a high school education background who lives in Trenggalek, East Java says that as a person who revels in lyrics, he understands more about the content of a song which is made based on personal experience.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents are asked to mention songs that they feel related to. Some respondents mention songs sung by
foreign musicians like One OK Rock (Japan), BTS and Super Junior (Korea), Miley Cyrus, Ben Platt (America), and also Simple Plan (Canada). Other respondents mentioned songs sung by Indonesian singers like Yura Yunita, Tulus, Kunto Aji, Indies, and Nadin Amizah.

CONCLUSIONS

Idgitaf, Nadin Amizah, Feby Amalia, and Fiersa Besari prove their consistency in choosing themes and composing lyrics. They have a distinct style that distinguishes them from other musicians. The questionnaire results show that Takut, Bertaut, and Runtuah are original autobiographical works and not merely commodification of pop music.

The questionnaire distributed to 64 respondents indicates that young listeners between 18-30 years feel related to lyrics that represent their feelings or describe the situation they were experiencing. Here are more detailed findings:
1) 70.3% (45 people) feel related to Takut
2) 62.5% (40 people) feel related to Bertaut
3) 67.2% (43 people) feel related to Runtuah

This connection is not influenced by educational background, age, domicile, or gender. However, unlike the initial hypothesis, 56.3% (36 people) of the respondents state that knowing a song is autobiographical does not change their opinion and feelings towards the song.

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