

Sukatani controversy: Music and resistance

The controversy surrounding the song “*Bayar Bayar Bayar*” (Pay, pay, pay) by the musical group Sukatani presents an opportunity to examine the role of music as a tool for social control within the framework of institutional hegemony.

While music is often regarded as a medium for free expression, it can also be utilized by those in power to maintain the status quo. In this context, the response of the National Police to Sukatani’s song can be interpreted as an effort to preserve institutional hegemony by controlling public narratives.

Hegemony, as conceptualized by Gramsci (1971), refers to the dominance of one group over others through cultural and ideological consensus, rather than through physical coercion or violence alone. In the case of Sukatani, the pressure exerted on the band to apologize and remove their song demonstrates how institutions can wield their authority to restrict narratives perceived as threatening.

Following the mounting public criticism, the Central Java Police questioned six officers in connec-

tion with the alleged intimidation against the two personnel of Sukatani and let the Purbalingga-based post-punk band sing the song both on the stage and digital platforms.

Music serves not only as a medium for critique, but also as an instrument of social control. According to Adorno (1941), music can be employed by those in power to reinforce existing social structures. In this instance, the pressure on Sukatani to withdraw their song can be seen as an attempt to uphold the image and authority of the National Police, an institution that ironically espouses the motto of “Protecting, Guiding and Serving the Community”.

Adorno argues that mass-produced music, in particular, can dismantle false consciousness, which perpetuates structural injustices. By removing “*Bayar Bayar Bayar*”, the police indi-

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rectly sought to control the public narrative regarding their performance, thereby preventing the emergence of critical awareness among the populace.

However, hegemony is not always entirely successful, as there is always room for resistance. Resistance to hegemony often manifests in subtle forms, such as art and musical lyrics. In the case of Sukatani, although their song was removed, its message persisted in public discourse, conversations in coffee shops, social media and the speeches of demonstrators. This illustrates that music can function as an effective tool of resistance, even in the face of institutional pressure. Scott (1990) refers to this phenomenon as “weapons of the weak”, where marginalized groups use art, particularly music, to challenge domination.

Today, social media plays a crucial role in amplifying resistance

to hegemony. It has transformed power dynamics by providing a platform for voices that were previously marginalized. The virality of “*Bayar Bayar Bayar*” on social media demonstrates how these platforms can be utilized to counter institutional attempts to control narratives.

Social media not only serves as a distribution channel, but also as a space for discussion, enabling the mobilization of public opinion. This aligns with Castells’ (2012) argument that digital communication networks have created new public spaces that are difficult for traditional power structures to control through intimidation and repression.

Music also functions as an archive of collective memory, preserving significant experiences and events within a society. Sukatani’s song can be viewed as a record of public dissatisfaction with the police’s performance during a specific period.

Despite its potential as a tool for critique, music has its limitations. From Bourdieu’s (1995) perspective, the effectiveness of music as a medium of critique depends on the

cultural capital possessed by both its creators and its audience. While “*Bayar Bayar Bayar*” succeeded in sparking public discourse, not all segments of society have equal access to or understanding of the message it conveys.

Bourdieu argues that art, including music, becomes a site of symbolic struggle, where groups with greater cultural capital possess the power to define reality. As a result, the lines between truth and falsehood become blurred. Institutions in positions of power have the resources to manipulate their version of the truth, and by silencing Sukatani’s critical music, the police demonstrated this capacity.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of music as a tool of resistance. While it can disseminate critical messages, music lacks the structural power to transform existing systems.

In this case, “*Bayar Bayar Bayar*” may effectively capture injustice, but without organized and massive social movements, its impact will remain temporary. Music serves as an initial catalyst for awareness, which must be followed by more concrete collective action.

Repressive responses to critical music like “*Bayar Bayar Bayar*” can ironically strengthen the message being conveyed. When institutions of power take harsh measures against artistic expression, it is interpreted as evidence that the critique is valid and threatens the status quo. In other words, efforts to silence critical music can backfire, reinforcing the narrative that the institution is intolerant of criticism and transparency.

Ultimately, the Sukatani case reminds us of the importance of protecting freedom of expression, particularly in the realm of music. When music is silenced, it is not only the voice of individuals that is lost but also the collective voice representing societal dissatisfaction and aspirations.

Therefore, safeguarding freedom of expression must be a priority, especially in a nation that claims to uphold democracy like Indonesia. As we mark National Music Day, which falls on March 9, we are reminded that as a cultural artifact, music must be recognized as a space where critique and dialogue can occur without the threat of repression.