

# The Sounds of Grassroots: Peace Discourse in Nasida Ria's International Relation Themed Songs

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**Keywords:** Nasida Ria, Discourse, Peace, International Relations, Critical Discourse Analysis

**Abstract:** Nasida Ria is a qasidah group based in Semarang, Indonesia which has been active since 1975. This all-woman group is well-known for playing the qasidah music, a genre popular for its Islamic content and it's the middle-lower class audiences. Besides playing songs about Islam and domestic issues among women, Nasida Ria had actually included international issues within their songs. Take for instance songs like "Damailah Palestina" (Be in Peace, Palestine), "Tahun 2000" (The Year 2000), "Dunia Semakin Panas" (The World is Getting Hotter), and "Dunia dalam Berita" (The World in News). This background has indeed become a unique phenomenon, as qasidah is not common to raise issues about international relations. This article attempts to discuss two questions: (1) how is peace discourse presented in Nasida Ria songs? and (2) how peace discourse in Nasida Ria's songs is related to other peace discourses? The authors use qualitative method in order to answer those questions. We collect the data through two means: interviewing the Nasida Ria group themselves and doing library research. The collected data are analyzed with Fairclough critical discourse analysis. The authors found that the discourse on peace in Nasida Ria songs above have several characteristics such as building for positive peace through equality and good environment, shared responsibilities in achieving peace, and the importance of spirituality.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Music had been considered as a part of diplomacy process since the 16th century according to what Castiglione wrote in *The Courtier*. This, however, did not imply that music became a part of International Relations studies; at least before International Relations cultural turn in 1970s. In 1970s, efforts to incorporate cultural aspect to United States foreign policy made many facets of culture were being tried to be put in US foreign policy analysis. Yet this didn't make the cultural analysis in International Relations only be centered on US foreign affairs; it is also directed to find and understand deep forces in international relations. From this point, then, music was more integrated in cultural dimension of International Relations studies; not only to understand how music can be used to mobilize a war, but also to comprehend how music can be utilized in peace-building (Prevost-Thomas & Ramel 2018, p.2).

However, compared to the other dimensions, there is still a lack of music studies in International Relations. Thus, the authors look toward Indonesia as

an endeavor to put Indonesia in light and develop music and international relations studies in Indonesia. There is a stigma or stereotype in Indonesia that affairs in International Relations can only be conferred, discussed, and voiced by fortunate people or high-class elites. This, however, is not what the authors found as an uncanny or unexpected phenomenon in Indonesian music that can be related to International Relations. Songs made by cross-genres Indonesian musicians rarely talk about international relations issues; even from musicians whom are considered as high-class musicians in today post-authoritarian era. The unexpected came from Nasida Ria.

Nasida Ria is one of the modern qasidah development pioneers in Indonesia. This all-woman group was established in Semarang, Central Java by H. Muhammad Zain at 1975. In its early age, Nasida Ria music were heavily influenced with arabic elements and their songs were fully in arabic. Nasida Ria, until 2011, had already created 350 songs that were consisted in 35 albums. While many of their songs were talking about private issues, there are

plenty of them that highlight public issues. Most of their songs on public issues were conferring on domestic-level; yet some of Nasida Ria songs were explicitly voicing about international issues.

The authors realize that there are plenty of research materials, theoretical perspectives, or angle of view that can be used to analyze Indonesian music related to International Relations; this realization is followed by the realized need to limit the scope of our research. Thus, the authors will focus this research in finding peace discourse in 4 Nasida Ria International Relations themed songs; they are “Damaillah Palestina” (Be in Peace, Palestine), “Tahun 2000” (The Year 2000), “Dunia Semakin Panas” (The World is Getting Hotter), and “Dunia dalam Berita” (The World in News). Therefore, the authors will heavily use discourse analysis in this research and brief explanations for discourse analysis in International Relations, peace discourse in International Relations, and critical discourse analysis itself are clearly needed.

### 1.1 Discourse Analysis in International Relations

In recent years, the scholarship of International Relations has brought the discursive turn. This approach is epistemologically trying to divert away from the traditional-positivistic way of reaching knowledge. It challenges the notion that the world contains objects which are “independent of ideas of beliefs about them” and thus offering an alternative which puts the emphasis on interpretation (Campbell 1993, p.7-8). Milliken (1999, p.226) describes that discourse analysis presents a challenge toward the “scientism” of International Relations which obsesses itself with the search for scientific theories, laws, and (seemingly) methodologies.

However, it is not to say that discourse analysis is a flawless approach in International Relations. As a seemingly deviant method of knowledge-seeking, discourse analysis is seen to be a “bad science” due to its lack in measurable theories as well as empirical analyses. On the other hand, we argue that this assumed weakness of discourse analysis has offered another facet which turns it into another advantage. Without the rigid and overly-standardized approach, discourse analyses are able to cement itself as a useful tool to initiate a more interdisciplinary approach toward International Relations. By putting more highlight on various attributes which we usually take for granted, for instance languages, ideas, or beliefs, discourse analysis provides deeper interpretations on

the “truth” which otherwise cannot be revealed through traditional positivistic way of research.

### 1.2 Peace Discourses in International Relations

The study of peace and war is widely considered as the central theme of International Relations scholarship. Therefore, it provides no doubt that the theme remains the unlimited source of debates. Each theory, accordingly, contributes different views on what causes war and how the condition of peace is established. The classical form of realism, for instance, argues that peace and war finds its roots from the violent tendency of human nature. The more contemporary variants, such as neorealism and neoliberalism, shift their focus from the dangerous human nature toward the more practical and measurable explanations. Neorealism, for instance, departs from the common logic that international system is an anarchic one, thus the states’ behavior is mainly driven by the pursuit of power under such condition (Mearsheimer 2001). Realism’s counterpart, liberalism, provides another argument. This theory departs from Kant’s work *Perpetual Peace* (1795) saying that peace builds upon three foundations: democracy, economic interdependence, and international organizations. This position is even still refined by neoliberal scholars such as Keohane and Nye (1977) who pinpoint that it is not merely the application of the three principles, but more of the complex interdependence among those modern states which puts a better precondition of peace.

Discourse theory provides a more radical perspective on war and peace. Finding its roots from a constructivist epistemological position, it supports the notion that the way people perceive the issue determines the further aspect of reality. Putting it to the real case, discourse can be found through sources such as speech acts, writings, signs, news releases, or even products of art. Relating to the flexibility of discourse as a tool of analysis, we regard that we can approach peace through various lenses—not exclusive to Western theories only. Thus, this paper attempts to collaborate the discourse analysis with Islamic views on peace. Regarding this issue, it is obvious that Islam holds its own unique position. As a religious ideology, Islam holds a position which puts it differently from other secular ideologies. Mirbagheri (2012, p.83) writes that that peace is “a Divine condition of existence as experienced in Paradise whilst enmity and war are attributes of earthly affairs as the direct result of satanic deeds.” Islam regards that the spiritual dimension of

humankind cannot be independent from the condition of peace, thus it transcends the material world. We examine that this view aligns with Johan Galtung's view on the "positive peace" which does not only constitute the absence of violence, hence "negative peace", but also the inclusion of integration of human society (1964, p.2).

### 1.3 Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourses are forms of social practice. They are also obviously texts (in the wider sense of the word). But Fairclough's framework adds a mediating third dimension which focuses on discourse as a specifically discursive practice (Fairclough 1992a, p.71). As Wodak and Meyer (2009) explain, Fairclough highlights the semiotic reflection of social conflict in discourses, which translates into his interest in social processes (i.e. social structures, practices and events). According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), CDA can be helpful in theorizing transformations and creating awareness "of what is, how it has come to be, and what it might become, on the basis of which people may be able to make and remake their lives" (p. 4). With such an objective in mind, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) claim that CDA of a communicative interaction sets out to show that the semiotic and linguistic features of the interaction are systematically connected with what is going on socially, and what is going on socially is indeed going on partly or wholly semiotically or linguistically.

In this approach of CDA, there are three analytical focuses in analyzing any communicative event (interaction). They are text, discourse practice (e.g. the process of production and consumption), and sociocultural practice (e.g. social and cultural structures which give rise to the communicative event) (Fairclough 1995, p. 57; Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999, p. 113). Analysis of text involves linguistic analysis in terms of vocabulary, grammar, semantics, the sound system, and cohesion-organization above the sentence level (Fairclough 1995, p. 57). The next analytical focus of Fairclough's three-part model is discourse practice. In this second dimension we will see the content of ideology or understanding of the processes of text production and text consumption. Meanwhile, the forming of the discourse can be a background knowledge, interpretation and context. Meanwhile, the last dimension is socio-cultural practice; it is how social context out of the text can influence the discourse.

## 2 METHODS

This study applied Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis with qualitative approach. Creswell (2009) states that qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Data collection in this study was first conducted by determining the object of the study. There are 7 songs of Nasida Ria which related with international relations, however the authors reduced it into 4 songs that best fit the category of various peace discourse: "*Damailah Palestina*" (Be in Peace, Palestine), "Tahun 2000" (The Year 2000), "*Dunia Semakin Panas*" (The World is Getting Hotter), and "*Dunia dalam Berita*" (The World in News). Then after that the supporting data is collected through in-depth interview with Choliq Zain, Nasida Ria's manager, as well with library study to complete the information. As for data analysis, the first level analysis on textual dimension, which is the song's lyrics, is used to answer the first research question. On this part, the authors heavily focus on the using of linguistics features such as vocabularies and grammars. Meanwhile, the results of the interview and library study were used to answer the second research question. Finally, after the analysis part was done, the writer drew the conclusion about peace discourse in Nasida Ria's songs and how it is related with other peace discourse.

## 3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Textual Analysis

The focus of this part is on the textual level proposed by Fairclough as the first dimension of his discourse. 4 songs were used and their vocabularies and grammar features were broken down by taking small pieces of the lyrics that represent peace discourse.

### 3.2 *Damailah Palestina* (Be in Peace, Palestine)

One thing that the authors noticed is the rare presence of any active subjects used to do any significant actions to frame any actors responsible behind the wars. Even when an active subject appears, it is the word "world", as quoted below:

*"Dunia jangan adu domba Palestina"* (O world, do not instill enmity in Palestine)

*"Bantulah perdamaian Palestina"* (Bring assistance for peace in Palestine)

The scarcity of active subjects "world" has implications in the possible reception of the song. The word "world" emphasizes the sense of unity since it does not reach specific race, class, age, religion, nor ideology. It means that peace is a shared responsibility and it will not be simply established with one or two nations but the cooperation of many.

### 3.3 *Tahun 2000 (The Year 2000)*

*Tahun 2000* was published in 1982 and it speaks about future condition of the year 2000. First of all, the song attached the year 2000 with the words hope (noun), challenge (noun), and worrying (verb), as quoted below.

*"Tahun dua ribu tahun harapan"*, (The year 2000, the year of hope)

*"Yang penuh tantangan dan mencemaskan"* (which is full of challenges and worrying)

The expressive word of "hope" then attached to the noun "machine", as what depicted as hope is the development of machines that ease human's life starts from walking, running, eating, sleeping, and working. However, the next expressive word "challenge" then attached to the noun *pengangguran* (unemployment), as the rapid growing of such modernization could cause human resources to be less needed and replaced by machines instead. The next expressive word, which is "worrying", attached to the noun *pencemaran* (pollution). Not only those machines could bring quite a challenge for human in the year 2000, but also bring more harm regarding to environment degradation, since many green lands will be replaced by factories or other buildings.

### 3.4 *Dunia Semakin Panas (The World is Getting Hotter)*

This particular song was published around the end of 1980s and speaks about the world that is getting hotter and feels cramped due to the harsh economic situation. However, the situation then was questioned by the song: is it the world that is hot and cramped, or is it our hearts? This song walks on different path when talking about peace since unlike the other two songs above; it talks about spiritual peace. In this part, the using of metaphors will be discussed.

*"Bumi tempat luas langit terang benderang"* (the earth is spacious, the sky is bright)

*"Banyak jalan lapang menuju bahagia"* (there are many large ways towards happiness)

As quoted above, one needs to be an obedient God's servant thus the world feels spacious and the sky is bright. All of these are basically metaphors to explain that one's happiness is not based on how much wealth one possessed but by how one communicates and be thankful to one's God.

### 3.5 *Dunia dalam Berita (The World in News)*

This is the part of the lyric that represent the whole structure of the song:

*"Ada yang kelaparan menantikan santunan"* (There are who starve waiting for donation)

*"Yang satu berlebihan yang lain kekurangan"* (One has plenty while the other have few)

This song is structured this way to contrast between the fortunate and the unfortunate. This structure, related to the title of the song, does clearly try to show that how the world is separated by disparity that is created from inequality.

### 3.6 *Intertextuality in Nasida Ria's Songs*

Next, Fairclough outlines that intertextuality is the following stage of discourse analysis. Intertextuality is defined as how certain texts can shape the creation of other texts. This stage attempts "to reach explanatory understanding of how particular sorts of text are connected with particular forms of social practice" (Fairclough 1992b, p.269). In this case, we are more interested in examining the concepts of International Relations which we assume have influenced the lyrics of Nasida Ria's songs. Our findings indicate that there are several International Relations narratives which we can find within the lyrics.

The first narrative which we examine is peace. Considerably all of the four songs which we picked have put this theme as their main narrative. If we are to put Galtung's concept on positive and negative peace toward this discussion, then we can see that all presented songs discuss the grand narrative on peace. Take *"Damailah Palestina"* for instance, which stands out as it brings out the theme of negative peace into discussion. The former mentions the urgent need to end violence in Palestine by highlighting the similarity of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the "agama samawi" (religion of the heavens) as well as the common owner of the Palestinian land. At the end of the lyrics, the singer calls for the respective adherents to return to God's teaching on peace. On the other hand, other songs like *"Tahun 2000"*,

“*Dunia Semakin Panas*”, and “*Dunia dalam Berita*” highlight the issue on building the preferable structural condition of peace—something which Galtung prescribes to create the state of positive peace. In “*Dunia dalam Berita*”, the song narrates the singer’s experience of watching the current affairs of the world, where various phenomenon occur such as war, arms race, draught, and poverty.

The different facet which is apparent within Nasida Ria songs is how they put importance on universalism. This is distinctively apparent in the “*Damailah Palestina*” song. The lyrics describe Palestine as a harmed corner of the world which is as well the home of the three major religions. We argue that this neutral position does not contradict the values of Islam as the religion itself still aligns with the concept of universal peace. We can see this through the argument of Mirbagheri (2012), saying that while Islam acknowledges the division of humankind, virtue is the only thing which differentiate each other (p.90). He specifically cites the verse 32 of surah Al-Maidah, which asserts “if anyone slew a person it would be as if he slew the whole of mankind; and if he saved a life, it would be as if he saved the whole of mankind.”

Another interesting aspect of Nasida Ria’s songs is how they correlate the international issues with the imperatives to increase one’s spiritual qualities. It is therefore can be suggested that in the Islamic peace discourse, spiritual matters are something which cannot be separated from the context of peacebuilding. This makes Nasida Ria a unique grassroots actor in disseminating the global issues. Using Islam as the grand narrative, they have successfully transcends the religious aspects by entering the seemingly-mundane realms such as international peace and war.

### 3.7 Sociocultural practices

Based on the authors interview to Choliq Zain, today Nasida Ria manager, son of H. Muhammad Zain, he told the authors that KH Achmad Buchori Masruri did not only read Islamic classic books (*kitab kuning*); Masruri had a fondness in reading articles of scientific journals especially from Bandung Institute of Technology. Choliq Zain also added that Masruri was an alumnus from *Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; it is one of the islamic university in Indonesia. These influenced Masruri in writing lyrics of Nasida Ria songs. Choliq Zain, however, did not know the titles of the books often read by KH Achmad Buchori Masruri and the

authors, unfortunately, could not find information about it.

The titles of the books are important because all of the four songs were published before internet entered Indonesia. Internet first entered Indonesia in 1994 yet the four songs were published around 1980s. This implies that KH Achmad Buchori Masruri must have vast amount of information resources giving consideration to some details in Nasida Ria songs’ lyrics. Some of the details can be found in their song lyrics like “*Australia kebanjiran, Afrika kekeringan*” (Australia severed from flood, Africa severed from drought) which shows that Masruri had access to information of floods in Australia and droughts in Africa; the latter was probably a stereotype, but the former need an information access. It also can be found in “*Ada yang membuat peluru kimia terlaknat*” (There is a one who make cursed chemical ammunition) which also shows that Masruri had access on information about chemical weapon.

There is one interesting finding specifically related to Palestine. Nasida Ria published song titled “*Damailah Palestina*” (Be in Peace Palestine) between 1978 and 1985. The publishing year is clearly before Palestinian Declaration of Independence in 1988; a declaration of independence that is done by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This, then, shows that the Palestine mentioned in Nasida Ria song is not the Palestine that declared independence in 1988. The Palestine in Nasida Ria songs are likely used to refer to the region that was formerly ruled by Ottoman Sultanate but then lost to British because of World War I. This implicates that the sought peace is not in Palestine as an independent state for at them time the state did not exist yet; but in Palestine as a region which its area is contested between states and religious communities.

This, however, is not surprising considering his *Nahdlatul Ulama’s* background. *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) is one of the largest and oldest Islamic organization often considered as the face of moderate Islam. Since the beginning of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, NU put concerns to Palestine far before Indonesia independence. NU founder, KH Hasyim Al-Asy’ari, had frequent communications with Sheikh Muhammad Amin Al-Husaini, British-appointed Muslims leader of British Mandate of Palestine. Until today, *Nahdlatul Ulama* advocates for peace in Palestine region and, different with many Islamic groups that are usually influenced by transnational Islamist ideologies, does not necessitate the annihilation of Israel (Rijal 2017). It means that there is always consideration for other options like two-state or one all-new state solution in Palestine region.

Nasida Ria songs are also usually quoted by Islamic preachers in Indonesia especially preachers affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama*. While there have not been any information on which songs are often quoted, but this gives a partial picture of Nasida Ria songs' influence in (at least, Javanese middle-lower class) Indonesia Muslims. Messages in the quoted songs will be internalized with more ease to the Islamic preachers' audiences.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results above, the authors conclude that peace discourse in Nasida Ria international themed songs have several important aspects. The first aspect of the peace discourse is the necessity to have absence of war and go beyond negative peace; achieve positive peace. In order to achieve positive peace, Nasida Ria songs indicate the need to have structural changes to overcome wealth inequality and prevent further environmental degradation. The second aspect of the peace discourse is universalism or shared responsibilities in building peace. Nasida Ria songs never put weight of responsibility to achieve peace on a third specific subject. Their songs indicate that the effort to achieve peace should be rooted from personal community or group contemplation and the efforts have to be done with other communities and groups. The third aspect of the peace discourse in Nasida Ria songs is the importance of spirituality. Different with secular perspectives on peace which often have to be empirical, Nasida Ria songs indicate that good condition of spirituality is also important component in achieving peace. Nasida Ria international themed songs peace discourse can be shown to be partially parallel to liberalism perspective on peace based on its emphasize on shared responsibilities; some parts are parallel to left thought based on its highlight on inequality; some parts are parallel to environmentalist; yet all of them are claimed to be based on Islamic teaching with additional of the importance of spirituality.

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