

INVESTIGATING NATIONALISTIC IDEALS: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF *MALAYSIA MADANI* SONGS

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ABSTRACT

The concept of nationhood is a complex and contested construct, shaped by the interplay of shared identity, political aspirations, and social narratives. A critical aspect of this process is the strategic use of media, including music to foster national cohesion. Governments frequently employ various platforms, such as print media, films, and songs to craft and disseminate a unified national narrative. This study examined the role of patriotic songs in shaping national discourse, focusing on patriotic music videos released during the tenure of Dato' Sri Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister, which promote the *Malaysia Madani* narrative. Employing discourse analysis as the primary methodological approach and grounded in Searle's (1976) Speech Act Theory, the study analyses the lyrics of selected songs through the lens of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts. The findings indicate a predominance of assertive and directive speech acts, highlighting the lyricists' intent to assert ideological positions and influence public perception. Additionally, the repetition of specific words and phrases, a common technique in musical production, is identified as a mechanism for reinforcing national identity and internalising the *Malaysia Madani* vision among listeners. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on government communication strategies, demonstrating that music can serve as an effective tool for ideological dissemination alongside conventional state-controlled media. This study underscores the significance of alternative communicative media in fostering national unity and provides a foundation for future research on the intersection of music, politics, and discourse.

Keywords: Nationhood; Patriotic Songs; *Malaysia Madani*; Discourse Analysis; Speech Act

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of nationhood has long been a subject of scholarly discourse, encapsulating a complex intersection of collective identity, political aspirations, and social constructs. Central to this notion is the shared sense of belonging among a group of people, a theme extensively explored by Hutchinson and Smith (2020). This collective identity is not merely an organic phenomenon but is often shaped by political structures, as Wimmer (2018, p.152) asserts, “there are two main aspects of nation building: the extension of political alliances across the terrain of a country (the political-integration aspect); and the emergence of a sense of loyalty to and identification with the institutions of the state, independent of who currently governs (the political-identity aspect)”. Contemporary research further highlights the socially constructed nature of nationhood, with Brubaker (1996) emphasizing that political elites strategically deploy narratives, myths, and symbols to cultivate national cohesion and sustain ideological hegemony.

A key theoretical lens through which nationhood is examined is Benedict Anderson’s (1983) conceptualization of nations as "imagined communities". Anderson contends that national belonging is cultivated through shared cultural experiences, historically disseminated via print capitalism such as newspapers, books, and formal education systems. Traditionally, print media played a pivotal role in shaping national consciousness (Liu & Chang, 2021; McCree, 2023); however, the transition to digital communication has significantly altered this dynamic (Medjanova & Atayeva, 2024; Saxena, 2019). Governments, recognising the diminishing influence of traditional print media, have increasingly turned to digital platforms, social media, and localised content creation as alternative strategies for fostering national identity (Heang, 2024; Maziashvili et al., 2022).

Despite extensive scholarship on nationhood and the media's role in shaping national identity, a notable gap persists in the examination of digital media, specifically patriotic song music videos as instruments of nation-building. While previous studies have explored the dissemination of nationalist ideologies through traditional media (e.g. Saxena, 2019; Reiter & Matthes, 2023; Wimmer, 2018), limited research has interrogated the mechanisms through which digital-era patriotic media productions construct national sentiment, particularly within the Malaysian context. Furthermore, while scholars acknowledge the role of political elites in shaping national narratives (e.g. Brubaker, 1996; Capano et al., 2023), there remains insufficient empirical analysis on how such narratives are embedded and conveyed through contemporary cultural artifacts, such as patriotic music videos.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by critically analysing patriotic song music videos released during the tenure of Dato’ Sri Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia’s 10th Prime Minister, which promote the *Malaysia Madani* narrative. The primary objective is to investigate how these music videos employ linguistic elements to reinforce national identity and ideological messaging. Utilising a qualitative discourse analysis framework informed by Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1976), this study examines the performative functions of language in song lyrics, assessing how specific speech acts contribute to the construction of national identity. By offering insights into the evolving role of digital media in contemporary nation-building, this study advances scholarly understandings of nationalism in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Social Construction of Nationhood

Nationhood is not an inherent characteristic of a population but rather a socially and historically constructed concept shaped by cultural, political, and economic influences (Солодова, 2024). The formation of national identity is essential for fostering social cohesion, ensuring political stability, and advancing economic development. Of course, as mentioned earlier, the national identity and national narratives are very much influenced by political elites and their ideologies, especially by politicians who were then elected as government of the day (Capano et al., 2023; Kirgil, 2023; Kulyk, 2024).

Around the world, governments employ various strategies to cultivate a sense of shared belonging among citizens, with education, religion, and language serving as key tools in the nation-building process (Olayinka & Ridwan, 2024; Mavengano et al., 2022). Educational institutions, for instance, play a central role in transmitting national values and fostering a collective identity (Bereketeab, 2020; Othman et al., 2021). Beyond merely disseminating knowledge, schools function as spaces where state ideologies are systematically reinforced (Harb & Thomure, 2020; Gu, 2023). Similarly, religious institutions contribute to national unity by providing a framework for shared moral values, as seen in Nigeria, where religious identity is closely intertwined with national consciousness (Umeanwe, 2025). Language also plays a crucial role in preserving cultural narratives and reinforcing collective historical memories, thereby solidifying national identity (Fedorchenko, 2024; Molina et al., 2024; Priwati & Sanitioso, 2024). Together, these factors form the foundation of ongoing state efforts to establish and sustain national cohesion. While these elements play a significant role in shaping national identity, they do not function in isolation. Broader theoretical perspectives help explain how national identity is socially constructed and maintained over time.

Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities" offers a fundamental theoretical perspective on national identity formation. He argues that nations are "imagined political communities" where individuals perceive themselves as part of a larger collective community despite never having met most of their fellow citizens. This shared sense of belonging is cultivated through various mechanisms. Historically, print capitalism had been instrumental in disseminating nationalist narratives through newspapers, novels, and other mass media, fostering a common cultural experience (e.g. Mao, 2018; Cheema, 2021). Additionally, educational systems institutionalise national identity by standardising language and teaching a common historical narrative (e.g. Kalanchina, 2024; Molotkina et al., 2025). National symbols such as flags, anthems, and state-sponsored commemorations further reinforce collective identity (Kurgan, 2024; Tribl, 2023). Moving to the new era of technological advances, the dissemination of nationalist narratives can now be found on social media and various types of digital forms and platforms.

Nationhood in Media and Cultural Productions

A substantial body of research has examined how various media forms including music, films, and advertisements, shape national identity by serving as powerful conduits for national ideologies and collective consciousness (Wang & Feng, 2024; Ali, Ullah & Shah, 2025; Matthews & Zain, 2022). These cultural mediums do more than entertain; they reinforce shared narratives, foster unity, and, at times, delineate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within a nation.

Music has been examined for its contributions to the economy (Chen, 2022; Gantchev, 2025), education (e.g., Meganathan et al., 2024; Cheng & Lam, 2025), and psychology (e.g., Javaid et al., 2024; Chen & Lam, 2025; de Witte et al., 2025), among other fields. More specifically, music has long served as a medium for fostering patriotic sentiment (e.g., Hamzah & Johan, 2020; Samper & Salcedo, 2024; Saryono & Puspitasari, 2024). Nguyen (2023) explored how Chinese hip-hop musicians inserted nationalism and patriotism ideologies in their lyrics. A recent study by Ali, Ullah and Shah (2025) emphasised how Pakistan national songs become an important stepping stone in bringing together Pakistani people with different ethnicity and language through lyrics mainly in Urdu and other local dialects. Saryono and Puspitasari (2024) found that “Kami Nusa Hitam” contained a message of nationalism and patriotism based on pride and love for the local culture. These studies emphasised the dual function of music, not only as a unifying force but also as a tool for defining the nation’s ideological and cultural boundaries.

Beyond music, advertisements also play a critical role in propagating nationalist ideologies (e.g. DURMUŞ, 2023; Lladonosa-Latorre & Visa-Barbosa, 2021). Scholars such as Matthews and Zain (2022) and Lladonosa-Latorre and Visa-Barbosa (2021) examined how advertisements reinforce nationalistic narratives, particularly in ethnically diverse societies, where media representations contribute to a constructed sense of unity. Handayani et al., (2024) observed two French versions of a car advertisement and found that both advertisements showed nationalism through French identity symbols such as flag colour, the national anthem and cheese. Another study analysed Malaysia’s festive advertisements and found that certain selected advertisements conveyed positive messages emphasising togetherness and unity through cultural diversity, exchange, and family institutions (Sualman et al., 2021). These studies suggest that advertisements are not merely commercial tools, but they also function as ideological instruments that influence national consciousness.

Governments frequently harness music videos and other media as part of their nation-building strategies, using them to evoke patriotism and strengthen national sentiment (Kirui, 2025; Gill & Batool, 2023). Malaysia, for instance, has strategically employed patriotic songs in campaigns such as 1Malaysia under Najib Tun Razak and the *Keluarga Malaysia* initiative led by Ismail Sabri Yaakob. Hamzah and Johan (2020) argued that these songs served as expressive mediums through which citizens engage with national narratives, reinforcing their sense of belonging. Additionally, political campaigns often incorporated music as a strategic tool to shape public opinion and solidify national identity (Quevedo-Redondo et al., 2023; Behr, 2021).

Ultimately, media and cultural productions are not passive reflections of national identity, but they actively construct and sustain it (Sualman et al., 2021). Through music, advertisements, and visual storytelling, these media shape public perceptions of nationhood, ensuring that national ideologies remain relevant in an ever-evolving cultural and political landscape.

National Ideology and Identity in the Changing Political Landscape

Malaysia has seen changes of political governments, and with it, the different ideologies that are imparted as part of the country’s national identity. We argue that a more visible form of politically driven national ideology has been evident since the tenure of Najib Razak, the 6th Prime Minister of Malaysia. He introduced the concept and motto of 1Malaysia. This was unlike his predecessor, whose motto/tagline/political slogan was not as prominent, and as widespread. For instance, *Wawasan 2020* was more like a national aspiration to be achieved rather than a

national agenda/ideology or a kind of branding that encapsulated the life of the citizens. Following the concept and motto of *1Malaysia* are the concepts of *Keluarga Malaysia* by Ismail Sabri Yaakob (the 9th Prime Minister) and currently the *Malaysia Madani* concept/ideology by Anwar Ibrahim (the 10th Prime Minister).

Briefly, the *1Malaysia* concept projected national identity as one that aimed "of building a united and progressive nation where the multicultural features of this country are used to form the *1Malaysia* identity" (Suid & Mustapha, 2014, p. 84). Arguably, it was one of the first political slogans or national slogans that were turned into a brand. For example, during the tenure ship of Najib Razak, the store chains called *Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia* was introduced. *Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia* sold some products for daily necessities that carry the brand logo, including dishwashing detergent, canned sardines, instant full cream milk powder among many others. The branding of *1Malaysia* was further empowered through the introduction of *1Malaysia* official song, the theme song for the 53rd National Day of Malaysia, in 2009.

The concept of *Keluarga Malaysia*, introduced by the 9th Prime Minister, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, encapsulates the vision of a unified and inclusive Malaysian society. Although specific scholarly discourse on the concept may be limited, its foundational principles resonated strongly with ongoing national efforts in governance, education, and community development. Central to *Keluarga Malaysia* is the principle of unity and inclusivity, exemplified through grassroots initiatives such as *Kawasan Rukun Tetangga* (KRT), which encouraged socioeconomic engagement and cooperation across ethnic and cultural lines (Farouk & Bakar, 2007). This emphasis on collective action reinforced a broader commitment to social cohesion, a critical pillar in Malaysia's multicultural framework. For instance, research on disaster resilience in Kelantan communities underscores how tightly knit social bonds enhance recovery and sustainability efforts, reflecting the communal spirit envisioned by *Keluarga Malaysia*. Similarly, an official theme song for *Keluarga Malaysia* was composed and played for the first time during the 64th National Day of Malaysia in 2021 (Bernama, 2021).

Malaysia Madani concept was introduced on 19th January 2023 as a national policy by Anwar Ibrahim. Moving forward, this concept has evolved to becoming a slogan and a brand that carries the national agenda and pushes the idea of a united national identity. The *Malaysia Madani* concept is built on six core pillars that aim to guide national development, promote values, and address modern challenges (<https://malaysiamadani.gov.my/>). The core pillars are:

Sustainability (Kemampanan)

Focuses on maintaining long-term ecological balance, social harmony, and economic stability. It emphasizes responsible development that protects resources for future generations.

Prosperity (Kesejahteraan)

Aims to enhance the welfare and prosperity of all Malaysians, ensuring equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities for every citizen, fostering a prosperous and fair society.

Innovation (Inovasi)

Encourages creativity, progress, and the adoption of modern technologies to drive national growth, improve competitiveness, and enhance the quality of life.

Respect (Hormat)

Promotes respect for diversity, ensuring social harmony through mutual understanding and appreciation of different cultures, beliefs, and practices within the Malaysian society.

Trust (Kepercayaan)

Focuses on building a trustworthy and transparent society, with an emphasis on integrity, accountability, and ethical behavior in both public and private sectors.

Compassion (Keadilan)

Stresses the importance of justice and equity, ensuring that every individual has access to opportunities and that social justice is upheld in every aspect of life.

These pillars, when integrated into various policies and practices, are designed to create a balanced, inclusive, and progressive society that aligns with both modern development and core ethical values.

Following the establishment of this slogan as the national policy, several songs were introduced including the official *Malaysia Madani* song. As such in this study, we aim to examine 1. the linguistics construction of *Malaysia Madani* ideology imparted in patriotic songs, and 2. the discourse function of these constructions in the songs and its relation to nation building. The methodology for this study is discussed in the following section.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis to examine how the *Malaysia Madani* narrative is conveyed through patriotic songs. Subsequently these songs were consumed by Malaysian citizens, thereby shaping their perceptions of nationhood and national identity. The research seeks to understand how lyrics contribute to national identity formation, disseminate ideological messages, and persuade audiences. By investigating these linguistic features, the study enhances knowledge on the intersection between music and political discourse.

Selection of Primary Text

The study focused on patriotic songs released during the leadership of Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim (2022–present). The selection process was guided by two main criteria: theme of the song and public engagement. The theme of the song is a key factor. We identified and chose songs that aligned with the core values of *Malaysia Madani*, including unity, development, and optimism. Additionally, public reception was assessed by the number of views of the videos presented in Table 1 (refer background of the song release section). Following these criteria, five songs were selected, and details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Patriotic songs

No	Song title	Artists	Background of the song release
1	Dear PMX-Keranamu	MK, Yonnyboii, Sufian Suhaimi, Meerfly, and Dani Kurama	A song dedicated to the Prime Minister of Malaysia (Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim), posted on 9th August 2023. The official music video gained 1.5 million views as of April 2025 (CapriceOriginalFilms, 2023).
2	Malaysia Madani	Bunkface	The <i>Malaysia Madani</i> song by Bunkface is an official campaign song for <i>Malaysia Madani</i> campaign (Mahmud, 2023). Composed by the group, the song was selected through several screening processes. First launch on 16th March in front of the Prime Minister himself. First posted on 22nd April 2023, the official music video now has over 200k views on [Malaysia MADANI, 2023] official YouTube channel.
3	Tekad Perpaduan, Penuhi Harapan	Khai Bahar and Aina Abdul	Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan is the official theme of National Day and Malaysia Day 2023. The theme was chosen and shared on 27th May 2023. Consequently, an official song with the same name was promoted in August 2023. The song was selected through a screening process. The official music video posted on (Radio Televisyen Malaysia, 2023) RTM YouTube Channel gained 44k views.
4	Setia Perpaduan	Dave, Awie (Melayu), Jaclyn Victor (India), Marsha (Dusun Sabah), Sabhi Saggi (Bajau Sabah), Suki Low (Cina), Cikgu Asani (Orang Asli), As'Ad Motawh (Melayu), Sissy Imann (Melayu), Iesya Toh (keturunan campuran), Bob (Bisaya Sarawak), Melissa Francis (Iban Sarawak), Hacharan Singh (Punjabi)	Setia Perpaduan, the theme song of National Unity Week, celebrates the spirit of Malaysia by bringing together the nation's major ethnic groups to spread the message of unity. The song was launched in May 2023 and officially posted on 24 May 2023. The music video has gained 53k views. It was reported that the King Himself initiated the concept of the song (Louis, 2023). Dave, who was the composer of the song, highlighted that he was told to compose a song that encouraged people to abandon inequality and embrace each other as one (D'Cruz, 2023). Dave further mentioned that the King called for a song about harmony and stability, and this came long before the unity government was formed and marked the start of the making of "Setia Perpaduan" (loyal unity). The official music video was posted on (@DjDaveMalaysiaOfficial, 2023) YouTube channel.

5	Kitai Segulai Sejalai	Lock N Load	Kitai Segulai Sejalai" is an Iban phrase, meaning "together with each other", that has been adopted as a national unity slogan in Malaysia. It was originally used as the motto for the national-level Gawai Dayak celebration in 2023. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim chose the phrase for its deep meaning of unity and shared journey, making it a symbol for national togetherness. The video was viewed 2.7k times on (WaveMix Production Sdn. Bhd., 2023) official YouTube channel, the production house of the song.
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Analytical Framework

As mentioned earlier, to systematically analyse the linguistic elements present in the lyrics, this research applied Speech Act Theory as the theoretical foundation and its analytical framework. This theory argues that language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for performing actions. Within the context of patriotic songs, different types of speech acts function as mechanisms for reinforcing national identity, persuading listeners, and articulating ideological commitments.

Speech act has been used to analyse patriotic songs (Laongpol, 2020; Ounjai 2018). Several studies have utilised Searle's (1976) Speech Act Theory to examine many different types of discourse. For instance, Kartika et al. (2023) study used speech acts to examine how power was reflected in the speeches of former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers argued that political speeches were not just a means of informing but functioned to exert one's power and project political intent. The study's aim was to analyse the illocutionary acts in Abe's speeches, thereby revealing the linguistic strategies he employed to manage the crisis and assert his power. The analysis revealed that Abe's speeches were heavily characterised by illocutionary acts aimed at informing and promising. Yulian and Mandarani (2023) study used Searle's Illocutionary Act theory as its primary framework to analyse teacher-student interactions in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. They argued that the teacher's verbal utterances were not random but were in fact specific actions designed to facilitate the learning process and manage the classroom environment. The study by Borchmann (2023) investigated the genre-specificity of headlines using a speech act analysis. The study argued that headlines functioned as illocutionary sub-acts, meaning their purpose was determined by the genre of the text they introduced. By analysing Danish newspaper's headlines from different newspaper genres, he found that news headlines primarily served a representative function, whereas opinion column headlines had a more expressive or directive purpose. The findings suggested that the illocutionary force of an utterance was not fixed but was influenced by its genre and context. These past studies illustrate how the Speech Act theory was widely used to examine a variety of discourses.

The analysis classifies speech acts into five key categories, each contributing to the construction of nationalist discourse (Searle, 1976):

1. Assertives: Statements that affirm shared values such as patriotism, unity, and national pride.
2. Directives: Appeals to the audience to engage in patriotic actions or embrace collective aspirations.

3. Commissives: Expressions of promises or commitments related to the country's future, fostering a sense of shared responsibility.
4. Expressives: Statements that convey emotions such as gratitude, hope, and national pride, strengthening the emotional connection between citizens and the state.
5. Declarations: Speech acts that enact changes through language, such as statements proclaiming national goals or ideological affirmations.

Through the application of Speech Act Theory, the present study aimed to uncover both explicit and implicit messaging strategies within patriotic lyrics, revealing how language was strategically utilized in shaping national discourse. The study followed a structured approach to analyse the linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of the selected songs through discourse analysis utilising the speech act categorisation. Below are the steps undertaken when analysing the songs:

Table 2. Steps in analysing the songs

Steps	Elaboration of the step	Example
Step 1	Initially, key lexical items and phrases that highlight themes of nationhood, leadership, and unity are identified.	Words such as <i>Keranamu</i> (because of you), <i>bersatu</i> (unite), <i>janji</i> (promise), and <i>harapan</i> (hope) are examined for their semantic and ideological implications.
Step 2	These linguistic elements are categorized according to their speech act function	The phrase <i>Selagi ku bernyawa, ku perjuangkan segalanya, Keranamu</i> (As long as I breathe, I will fight for everything, because of you) is classified as a commissive speech act, signifying a strong personal commitment to the nation and its leadership. Similarly, directive speech acts, such as calls for unity and collective action, are analysed for their role in mobilizing national sentiment.
Step 3	A contextual and rhetorical analysis is conducted to examine how lyrics may carry multiple interpretations.	The term <i>Keranamu</i> in Dear PMX - <i>Keranamu</i> could reference the Prime Minister, the Malaysian people, or the nation itself, demonstrating the deliberate use of ambiguity in patriotic discourse. Additionally, linguistic features such as ellipsis and omission are studied, as they often serve to subtly reinforce ideological meanings. An example includes the phrase <i>menaruh * untuk membina mimpi baru</i> (placing * to build a new dream), where the missing word encourages listeners to infer meaning based on their socio-political context.
Step 4	Lastly, an intertextual and cultural analysis explores how external cultural and political references shape the song's ideological influence.	One example is the lyric Bands a make her dance, originally from a Juicy J song referring to financial influence, which is reinterpreted in Dear PMX - <i>Keranamu</i> as a critique of corruption. This adaptation aligns with broader national discourses on governance and ethical leadership, demonstrating the interaction between popular culture and political ideology.

Although this study provided insights into how patriotic songs contributed to nation-building narratives, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The research focused exclusively on a selection of patriotic songs, excluding other forms of political messaging, such as speeches, policy statements, and state-sponsored visual media, which also play significant roles in shaping the *Malaysia Madani* ideology.

Furthermore, as a qualitative study, the findings are based on interpretative analysis rather than statistical measurement. The research emphasised textual and contextual analysis, which made it inherently subjective. Additionally, this study did not incorporate empirical audience reception data, such as surveys or interviews, which could offer deeper insights into how listeners perceive and internalise patriotic messages.

Despite these constraints, the research contributed to the broader scholarly discussion on national identity construction by demonstrating how language in music served as a vehicle for ideological dissemination. By examining the rhetorical and linguistic strategies within patriotic song lyrics, the study highlighted the strategic use of language to reinforce collective aspirations, shape political narratives, and cultivate a shared national identity within the *Malaysia Madani* framework.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

This study highlighted that patriotic songs go beyond artistic expression, functioning as deliberate tools for fostering national awareness. Through the analysis of speech acts, the construction of unity, reinforcement of national ideology, and promotion of an imaginary nation were examined. Commissive, assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts examined are presented in the following sections.

Commissives: Declarations of Loyalty and Commitment

A key linguistic feature of patriotic songs may be the use of commissive speech acts, which convey strong pledges to national ideals. However, our analysis revealed very few instances of commissive, with only two of the five songs examined containing such acts.

In *Dear PMX – Keranamu* song, the lyric *Selagi ku bernyawa, ku perjuangkan segalanya, Keranamu* (As long as I breathe, I will fight for everything, because of you) expressed an enduring commitment to the nation. The phrase *Selagi ku bernyawa* (As long as I breathe) suggested a lifelong struggle, portraying national devotion as a continuous obligation. Additionally, the word *Keranamu* (Because of you) was deliberately ambiguous, allowing for multiple interpretations. This ambiguity enabled the lyrics to appeal to diverse audiences, who may perceive it as a dedication to the leader, the people, or the country. Such linguistic flexibility expands the song's ideological influence, fostering a shared sense of belonging.

In *Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan* song, the line *Panas hujan ku tempuh, Penuhi harapanku* (Rain or shine, I will persevere to reach my dream/hope), was considered a commissive. Commissive here was implied, because the modal 'will' was omitted in the Malay version *Panas hujan [akan] ku tempuh*. In this case, the speaker was committed to go through anything to achieve his/her hope. It might also refer to the previous line in the lyrics about defending a homeland. Again, this reading of the lyrics, particularly this line, is open to interpretation and multiple possibilities.

Assertives: Statements Reinforcing Ideological Beliefs

Assertive speech acts in patriotic songs serve to establish ideological perspectives as truths (Laongpol, 2020). For instance, in *Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan*, the lyrics state, "*Negaraku Madani, Perpaduan di hati, Selamanya ku Malaysia.*" (My Madani Nation, Unity in our hearts, Forever I am Malaysian). The phrase *Negaraku Madani* (My Madani Nation) was not merely descriptive; it explicitly linked national identity with the *Malaysia Madani* ideology, reinforcing its role as a central principle in governance and societal cohesion. Unlike conventional patriotic slogans that emphasise resilience or pride, this assertion intertwined nationalism with a specific ideological model.

Most instances of assertives were found in *Setia Perpaduan* song. More than 7 lines of the lyrics were assertives, and they were repeated in different languages throughout the song. The lyrics shown below are collected from different verses:

Berbeza kita tidak memisahkan... (differences do not split us)

Kita sama bintang berkelip di malam hari (We are the same stars that shines in the night sky)

Kita suria mencerah ibu pertiwi (We are the sun that shines our motherland)

Disayap impian warnai kesaksamaan (In wings of dreams colouring equality)

Sejahtera sentosa damai kita... (We will be prosperous, peaceful and tranquil)

Menderu harmoni deru berhembus (Harmonious whistles, whistles on)

Di jiwa penyayang payungan terbilang... (In the loving soul of a distinguished guardian)

This song, as mentioned in Table 1, was inspired by the previous Yang Dipertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, with the aim of creating a song that fosters harmony and stability. As such, the use of the inclusive pronoun *we* (*kita*), was expected. Equating Malaysians with stars and sun, a type of metaphor, with strong visual imagery that painted the picture of how later we would be happy in a prosperous, harmonious land. Inclusiveness and togetherness were also depicted through the use of "the same stars" putting everyone on equal footing, also acknowledging everybody's pertinent role and contribution as a "sun" that would benefit the country. This goes back to the notion of an imagined nation by Benedict Anderson (1983), an important ideological tool of nationhood.

In the Iban song, *Kitai Segulai Sejalai*, four lines of lyrics were identified as assertives and these were repeated several times throughout the song. The lyrics were: *Saum penemu* (To share knowledge), *Saum pengidum* (To share lives), *Saum penglikun* (To share peace), *Kitai segulai sejalai* (together with each other). This song promoted togetherness, unity and the importance of sharing resources. In a way it beautified the idea of a shared journey. As mentioned in the Prime Minister's official website (2023, p. 1), the Prime Minister chose the phrase *kitai segulai sejalai* for its deep message of unity – "how unity among the various races could be adopted to build a nation". This was in line with Saryono and Puspitasari (2024) who found that patriotic songs nurture a love of local culture, which in the case of *kitai segulai sejalai*, include love for local dialects as well.

The song *Dear PMX* contained more than 30 lines of assertives; therefore, it is not feasible to list them all here. The reason was because the song was sung with rap verses in it, making each verse sung by different rappers unique to their own style and ideas. Choosing the most interesting and significant lines from the four rappers, we present the results in Table 3:

Table 3. Selected verses (assertives) from Dear PMX song

Rapper	Lines	Translation
MK	bagikan satu semangat selamat kan sejuta insan	share a spirit saving a million people
Yonniboy	genggam bara api ke puncak bak pembakar obor makmur berbilang agama suci luhurnya cita bukti dalam satu ikrar, erti juangnya perwira	hold an ember to the top like lighter torch prosperous with numerous religions the pure nobility of the aspiration evidence within one's vow, the significance of a warrior's fight
Meerfly	Apa yang telah terjadi bersepah tipu helah takkan ku dengar cerita lama sampai bumi terbelah berapa ramai jatuh tersungkur dan kena kifarah	What has happened scattered lies and scheme I will not listen to old stories until the earth cracks open how many have fallen to fall faced down and faced atonement
Dani Kurama	mana cukup waktu buat satu satu jadi kena maju	there is not enough time to do things one by one So we have to move forward

Based on Table 3, some important takeaways were related to the themes of saving people, heroism, corruption and time/chance. In MK's verse, he mentioned how giving support to PMX might help save lives. This part was in line with Dani Kurama's verse that also mentioned how time was needed, and one should make haste, but later in the verse he also mentioned (in a directive tone), that PMX should be given time (support) to prove himself, hence the assertive phrase *mana cukup waktu* (we don't have enough time). Yonniboy's verse glorified PMX as a hero (*perwira*), aligning him with heroic acts like making oath (*ikrar*) and crusade (*juangnya/perjuangan*). Similarly, Yonniboy's part echoed with Meerfly's part, where the crusade or combat of this hero was against corruption made by corrupt people, describing the corrupts as liars, and those who were punished (*kena kifarah*) due to their wrong doings. This echoed what Солодова (2024) iterated that nationhood was shaped by political influences. In the case of *Dear PMX* song, Anwar Ibrahim as an elite politician, influenced the ideals of how a nation should be free from corruption.

Directives: Calls for Unity and Collective Responsibility

Directive speech acts in patriotic songs serve as motivational appeals, urging listeners to engage in collective action (Laongpol, 2020; Ounjai, 2018). Directives were found in all five songs analysed in this study, with *Dear PMX* song having the least number found in only five lines as shown in the following.

simpan jari kelingking/do away with your promises
sila buang luar jendela/throw it out the window

berilah peluang kerajaan untuk membina/give the government a chance to build
...*beri masa* give a chance/give time
beri masa PMX buktikan semua/give time to PMX to prove it all

The first two lines were connected, and the directive was targeted at a liar or corrupted person who made empty promises. The function of directives in the first two lines was perhaps to sound more direct and ruder, as one was facing a liar or corrupted person. Lines three to five were directives targeted towards the Malaysian public. In those lines, instead of using a soft and kind sounding appeal, the lyricist used a more intense tone of urging the public to give the newly established ruling government time to build the nation and to give PMX time to prove himself as a Prime Minister. Perhaps, in retaliation to the voices of opposition within the communities at the time. In retrospect, this song was posted on 8 August 2023, in the first year after PMX was appointed (23 November 2022), where political turbulence was still at large and opposition parties were calling for PMX to resign (HarakahDaily, 2023). As such, perhaps this song not only functioned to promote unity but also to break disunity albeit through a more blatant approach of using directives.

In one particular song, *Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan*, many instances of directives were found to be used as shown below:

Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan

Cintai Malaysia (Love Malaysia)
Demi Malaysia (For Malaysia)
Laungkan bersama (Chant together)
Cintai Malaysia (Love Malaysia)

Laungkan bersama (Chant together)
Demi Malaysia (For Malaysia)
Penuhi tekad harapan kita (Fulfill our determination and hope)
Ini negara kita (This is our country)
Cintai Malaysia (Love Malaysia)
Cintai Malaysia...Selamanya (Love Malaysia...Forever)

The first line of the verse was a simple and direct call, which was to actually love one's country, stating the obvious that one should love and do things for the sake of their country (*Demi Malaysia*). While it was also possible to categorise *Cintai Malaysia* (Love Malaysia) as an expressive, we think that in this context, it functioned more like a directive urging the public to love the country. In the past, it came as something natural as a person who was born in a country would usually love the place and contribute to the country. This is no longer the case as many individuals now identify themselves as global citizens, and holding multiple nationalities has become fairly common. Hence the word at the end of the lyrics *selamanya* (forever), emphasising loyalty to one's country or urging the people to continue to love the

country. This phenomenon was explained through cosmopolitanism ideology in which one of the main tenets is the idea of global citizenship – when a person has "a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global" (UNESCO, 2015, p.1). An alternative and perhaps simpler explanation might be that the call was to mitigate the polarised opinions and societal divisions due to the effects of the post general election in 2022 that caused a huge political instability in Malaysia (Chin, 2022).

Interestingly in the verse *Penuhi tekad harapan kita*, the word *harapan* was inserted implying that the idea of creating a unified country can be achieved by having the current governing coalition parties leading the country, the name of this coalition party is Pakatan Harapan. It also reverberated with the year's motto for Independence Day *Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi Harapan* (Determination for Unity, Fulfilling Hope, 2023).

The next example is the official campaign song for *Malaysia Madani* by Bunkface. As indicated in Table 1, this song was selected through a thorough screening process and was officially endorsed by the government. It is important to note that the phrase *Malaysia Madani* was repeated 14 times throughout the song. While repetition is common in chorus, we argue that the function of repetition in this context was to prime the idea of this imagined nation called *Malaysia Madani* in the citizens' mind. This is in line with linguistic priming theory. The theory offers a compelling perspective of how our accumulated experience with words in context shapes our linguistic knowledge and abilities, emphasising the probabilistic and usage-driven nature of language and one of the key aspects of the theory is it is lexically driven (Cai & Zhao, 2024). This is illustrated in the lines below that were repeated throughout the song.

Ayuh seluruh anak pertiwi / Come on, children of the nation
Bangunkan Malaysia Madani / Let's build a civilised Malaysia
...Terus meyakini / Keep believing in
Malaysia Madani / Civilised Malaysia

Ayuh seluruh anak pertiwi / Come on, children of the nation
Semarakkan Malaysia Madani / Let's ignite the civilised Malaysia
...Terus meyakini / ... keep in believing
Malaysia Madani / Civilised Malaysia

The first two lines combined the idea of nationhood and governmental agenda. The last was also a type of political tool. *Malaysia Madani*, despite being used as the slogan in the case of the second line, it was also used as a type of adjective. The word *Madani* described an idealised nation of Malaysia. And the first line called Malaysian citizens to help build this idealised nation of Malaysia. The word *Madani* functioned both as a noun and as an adjective. The last line of the first verse primed the slogan *Malaysia Madani*. The second line emphasised this idea of how the citizens should continue in the trust of the idealised, imagined nation. Interestingly, the last line emphasises the slogan itself and the idealised nation.

The next song is *Setia Perpaduan Malaysia*.

Hulur tanganmu, Satukanlah hati (hold out your hand, put your heart together)
Sandarkan teman, bahumu bahuku, (lean on me friend, shoulder to shoulder)
Jalinkan perpaduan (build unity)

Usah kusutkan, Malaysia nan satu (don't ruin our only Malaysia)
Kita padukan, jiwa kebaktian (let's unite, devotional soul)
Menuju cerah, ke masa hadapan (towards a bright future)
Pimpinlah, tanganku sayang (hold my hand dear)

Leburkan permusuhan (let's forget the animosity)
padamkan sengketa (wipe away the disputes)

As depicted in the song title '*setia perpaduan*' (loyally united), i.e. unity was the heart of the song, and it was a consistent theme from one verse to the other. Directive was used to send a message for unity, and call to action as shown in the last line of verse one *jalinkan perpaduan* (build unity). It also talked about the dos and don'ts in building a united nation. Apart from that, the last two lines, *Leburkan permusuhan* (let's forget the animosity) and *padamkan sengketa* (wipe away the disputes) sent a very strong message in building unity as it signalled that we needed to let go of things in order to form unity. Harboursing animosity and disputes will only create tension.

The last two lines were yet another reflection of the current state of the country at the time where political instability and racial tension were heightened. Racial tension in particular has long been a bane in Malaysia's road to build unity due to a long history of colonial-led segregated communities (*dasar pecah dan perintah* - separate and rule policy) and complex relationships between different races post-independence (Daud, Hassan & A'zmi, 2021). And thus, it is particularly interesting to note that this particular song was sung by singers from different races, perhaps to promote inclusivity and unity not only through the lyrics but also through visual representation (Johan, 2020).

The song was sung not only in Malay (4 verses) but other dialects and languages: Iban language, Punjabi language, Mandarin, and Tamil among others. It was sung by 13 different artists of various ethnicities. Citing one of the news articles that reported about it: "The song has a Chinese beat, an Indian melody and Malay lyrics, and is one of those tunes that bring back memories of Malaysians unified in the joint experience of togetherness" (D'Cruz, 2023). This reinforced the idea of using songs as a medium to encourage a sense of belonging in a society (Hamzah & Johan, 2020).

Expressives: Emotional Appeals and National Affiliation

Expressive speech acts, which evoke emotions, are a key element in patriotic songs. Despite songs being a fertile medium for emotional expression, there were only a small number of expressives identified in the patriotic songs. None was found in *Tekad Perpaduan Penuhi harapan*, *Segulai sejalai* and *Setia perpaduan*, leaving only two songs containing expressives, and even then, the number was really small compared to assertives and directives. In *Dear PMX* song, four lines were identified as expressives while only one was identified in *Malaysia Madani*. The lines from *Dear PMX* are shown below.

Dear PMX
keranamu (because of you)
Kepadamu (to you)
ku menaruh untuk (I hope to)

membina mimpi baru (to build a new dream)

For the first verse in *Dear PMX*, *keranamu* (because of you) and *kepadamu* (to you) had ambiguous targets. They might refer to the nation or to PMX himself. The four lines were considered as a sentence and expressive here was implied because of the word *menaruh*. Because *menaruh* on its own means ‘to’, and most Malay native would associate *menaruh* in this context with ‘hope’ as in *menaruh harapan*. Interestingly the word *harapan* was omitted. A simple search on Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka Malay corpus, showed that *menaruh* collocated highly with *harapan*. Our argument is that *harapan* was the word that was purposely omitted. This was based on the fact the highest collocation of *menaruh* was *harapan*, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Collocational table of the word *harapan*

Kiri 5	Kiri 4	Kiri 3	Kiri 2	Kiri 1	Kanan 1	Kanan 2	Kanan 3	Kanan 4	Kanan 5
DAN 3	KERANA 3	YANG 4	ITU 4	TIDAK 13	HARAPAN 36	KEPADA 9	KEPADA 6	DAN 4	DAN 3
DI 2	ITU 2	DAN 3	TIDAK 4	MASIH 6	KEPERCAYAAN 10	TERHADAP 8	TERHADAP 4	YANG 3	YANG 3
RAKYAT 2	MEREKA 2	ITU 3	DAN 3	YANG 6	KEYAKINAN 6	TINGGI 7	TINGGI 4	BESAR 2	AKAN 2
SEBAGAI 2	ORANG 2	MEREKA 3	TETAPI 3	DIA 4	SEBARANG 4	YANG 6	BAHASA 2	HATI 2	ITU 2
	YANG 2	INI 2	DIA 2	ADA 3	SIMPATI 4	BAHAWA 4	DAN 2	ITU 2	
		KITA 2	INI 2	BOLEH 3	MALU 3	BESAR 4	TERHADAPNYA 2	KEPADA 2	
		LAIN 2	MASIH 2	DAN 3	SYAK 3	AKAN 3	TIDAK 2	MELAYU 2	
		PIHAK 2	RAKYAT 3	SAYA 3	DENDAM 2	DAN 3			
		PUN 2	TIADA 2	TELAH 3	GERAM 2	HARAPAN 3			
			YANG 2	KAMI 2	INGATAN 2	KEPADANYA 3			
				LAGI 2	MINAT 2	PADA 3			
				TETAP 2	SANGKAAAN 2	TETAPI 3			

The next instance of expressive was found in *Malaysia Madani* song through this line: *Sepenuh hati jiwa semangat* (with all [our] heart, soul and spirit). While it was the only expressive in the song, it was repeated four times, and it was part of the chorus of the song. Being repetitive and having the element of hook, the line *Sepenuh hati jiwa semangat* (with all [our] heart, soul and spirit) appealed to listeners and had emotional value attached to it. In this case, expression of emotion itself was also part of the hook being used in the chorus.

In the discussion about the directive, we mentioned that *Cintai Malaysia* (Love Malaysia) was considered as a directive. Whilst the word *cintai* (love) is an expressive in other contexts, in the context of the song, we argue that the illocutionary force of directive was stronger, overshadowing the expressive nature of the word. This shows that a word can function differently depending on the context it is used.

Going back to our first point regarding how the small number of expressions was unexpected, we argue that whilst emotion was an effective tool to move people, in effort to form unity and nation building, other elements were utilized. In a Chinese-based study, when emotion or pathos was used in patriotic songs, specifically heroic pathos was more common compared to other types of pathos (Kobzhitskaya et al., 2022). While we did not find evidence based on empirical numbers in our examination of expressives, we noticed instances of heroic

narrative in *Dear PMX* when discussions on assertives were presented earlier with the mention of crusades and oath (please refer to our discussion on assertives). Perhaps, nation building through patriotic songs, as examined in this study, is looked upon as a more logical and practical standpoint rather than an emotional one.

Although our examination of commissives, directives, assertives, and expressives was not quantitative in nature, the overall findings indicated that most verses were assertives and directives, with few instances of expressives and even fewer of commissives. Thus, what does this suggest? Assertives come in the form of statements and claims, and in these songs, these claims and statements pushed the idea of an idealised nation, an imagined nation that could be achieved or has already been achieved and should be protected. It carried certain ideology-laden values, often reflecting those of the ruling government and in this case, the *Malaysia Madani* ideology and its conception of an imagined nation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how patriotic songs contributed to shaping the *Malaysia Madani* narrative, highlighting their function as tools for ideological reinforcement through specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Applying Speech Act Theory as a framework, the analysis has shown that these songs were not merely artistic expressions but also served as persuasive devices that promoted national unity, affirmed leadership and governmental appointment, and strengthened social cohesion. The lyrics incorporated various speech acts: assertives to promote a shared national identity, directives to encourage civic participation and loyalty, commissives to express dedication to certain ideals, and expressives to evoke emotional attachment and hope for a better future. Additionally, this research identified rhetorical techniques within these songs, such as ambiguity, metaphor, and figurative language, which enhanced their persuasive impact. This research contributed insights into the linguistic variations utilised in Malaysian patriotic songs in the *Malaysia Madani* era, highlighting how specific lexical choices evoked feelings of patriotism, sense of belonging and national pride with strong emotional resonance.

While this research and much previous research on patriotic music videos has predominantly focused on lyrical and textual analysis (e.g., Awang et al., 2016), there is a growing recognition of the need for a multimodal analytical approach that examines linguistic, visual, and performative elements in tandem. Hence, we recommend that future studies should adopt an interdisciplinary approach, integrating textual, visual, and performative dimensions to deepen the understanding of nationalistic discourse in the digital era. By synthesising insights from multiple analytical perspectives, scholars can offer a more comprehensive examination of how media fosters national identity in contemporary societies.

In summary, patriotic songs function as influential instruments in shaping national identity and advancing ideological narratives. Through carefully constructed lyrics and intentional linguistic choices, these songs contribute to nation-building by fostering a sense of collective belonging among citizens of a country. As political and social contexts continue to shift, examining the role of patriotic music in shaping national discourse remains an important area for further academic exploration, particularly at the intersection of language, culture, and ideology.

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