

Original Article

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Song "Tatsulok (Triangle)" By Bamboo

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Abstract: This study critically analyzes the song "Tatsulok" by the Filipino band Bamboo, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore its socio-political messages and implications. The themes of socioeconomic inequality, power relations, and justice are examined in this study within the Philippine context. The song is a sociopolitical statement on the enduring problems of class conflict, the oppressed people's vulnerability, and the structural injustices that fuel social unrest on a large scale. In order to illustrate the hierarchical structure of Philippine society, where the powerful elite sit at the top and maintain inequality, the study examines the metaphor of the "tatsulok" (triangle). The study emphasizes the effects of social and political differences as well as the ongoing difficulty in obtaining justice for underrepresented groups, such as activists, human rights advocates, and the impoverished. The results highlight how critical it is to address systemic injustice, advance justice, and oppose the hierarchical mechanisms that uphold the socioeconomic disparity. By providing insights into how culture shapes public awareness and action for social transformation, this study advances our understanding of the relationship between music, social commentary, and political consciousness in the Philippines.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, socio-political critique, "Tatsulok", inequality, power dynamics, poverty, corruption, social justice, Philippine society, elite dominance, class struggle, structural change, Bamboo.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rom Dongeto wrote the Filipino folk song "Tatsulok" in 1989, and his trio folk-rock group "Buklod," which consists of Rene Boncocan and Noel Cabangon, played it in 1991. The song was composed by the New People's Army (NPA), the armed branch of the revolutionary Communist Party of the Philippines, during the so-called "Total War Policy" of the Philippine government, which was commanded by the late President Corazon Aquino. The song refers to the Philippine Government as the color "Yellow" (Filipino: "dilaw"), which is the color for which Aquino is known, and the NPA as the color "Red" (Filipino: "pula") because to its association with Communism. The band Bamboo made the song well-known in 2007 when they published their rendition of "Tatsulok" on their third album, *We Stand Alone Together*. Since its publication, the song has served as the anthem for young Filipino activists.

The song "Tatsulok" highlights how poverty is the primary cause of the nation's violent strife. This is a reference to the social pyramid, a system in which those with higher social rank are at the top and people with lesser social status are represented at the bottom. The majority of people still live in poverty, while a small number of elites continue to live in luxury, as the song makes clear. Therefore, the discrimination against lower-class people and the righteousness of prestigious high-class people only serve to highlight the existence of cultural dominance and the self-serving political patronage that controls power and influence, whereby those in positions of authority have rendered the vast majority of the poor into non-persons. Cultural supremacy influences and controls attitude and worldview, elevating the position of the wealthy, educated, balikbayan, and powerful while discriminating against and disadvantaging the rest.

It is true that Tatsulok is oppressive. It is a system of social injustice that upholds social prejudice, political patronage, economic destitution, and cultural value distortion. This song has the potential to rouse the impoverished who are oblivious to justice. Anyone could be motivated to fight for their rights by it as well.

The song's title, Tatsulok, sums up the social structure in which only a select few people can truly feel being at the top and in control. Karl Marx utilized the Tatsulok, or triangle in English, as a model and symbol to help us comprehend the social classes in a capitalist society. The wealthy and elitists are at the bottom and very top of the triangle.



“Tatsulok (Triangle)” Band Bamboo

Filipino/ Original Version	English Translation
<p>Totoy bilisan mo bilisan mo ang takbo</p> <p>Ilagan ang mga bombang nakatutok sa ulo mo</p> <p>Totoy tumalon ka dumapa kung kailangan</p> <p>At baka tamaan pa ng mga balang ligaw</p> <p>Totoy makinig ka wag kang magpa-gabi</p> <p>Baka mapagkamalan ka't humandusay dyan sa tabi</p> <p>Totoy alam mo ba kung ano ang puno't dulo</p> <p>Ng di matapos-tapos na kaguluhang ito</p> <p>Hindi pula't dilaw tunay na magkalaban</p> <p>Ang kulay at tatak ay di syang dahilan</p> <p>Hangga't marami ang lugmok sa kahirapan</p> <p>At ang hustisya ay para lang sa mayaman</p> <p>Habang may tatsulok at sila ang nasa tuktok</p> <p>Di matatapos itong gulo</p> <p>Iligtas ang hininga ng kay raming mga tao</p> <p>At ang dating munting bukid ngayo'y sementeryo</p> <p>Totoy kumilos ka baliktarin ang tatsulok</p> <p>Tulad ng dukha nailagay mo sa tuktok</p> <p>Hindi pula't dilaw tunay na magkalaban</p> <p>Ang kulay at tatak ay di syang dahilan</p> <p>Hangga't marami ang lugmok sa kahirapan</p> <p>At ang hustisya ay para lang sa mayaman</p> <p>Habang may tatsulok at sila ang nasa tuktok</p> <p>Di matatapos itong gulo</p> <p>Hindi pula't dilaw tunay na magkalaban</p> <p>Ang kulay at tatak ay di syang dahilan</p> <p>Hangga't marami ang lugmok sa kahirapan</p> <p>At ang hustisya ay para lang sa mayaman</p> <p>Habang may tatsulok at sila ang nasa tuktok</p> <p>Di matatapos itong gulo</p> <p>Habang may tatsulok at sila ang nasa tuktok</p> <p>Di matatapos itong gulo</p> <p>Di matatapos itong gulo</p>	<p>Totoy, run faster, run faster</p> <p>Avoid the bombs that are aimed at your head</p> <p>Totoy, jump, drop down if you must</p> <p>Or you might get hit by stray bullets</p> <p>Totoy, listen, don't stay out late</p> <p>You might be mistaken and fall dead on the street</p> <p>Totoy, do you know the beginning and end</p> <p>Of this endless chaos?</p> <p>It's not red and yellow that are truly enemies</p> <p>The color and the label are not the reason</p> <p>As long as many are sinking in poverty</p> <p>And justice is only for the rich</p> <p>While there's a triangle and they're at the top</p> <p>This mess will never end</p> <p>Save the breath of so many people</p> <p>And the once small field is now a cemetery</p> <p>Totoy, move, turn the triangle upside down</p> <p>Just like the poor, you've placed them at the top</p> <p>It's not red and yellow that are truly enemies</p> <p>The color and the label are not the reason</p> <p>As long as many are sinking in poverty</p> <p>And justice is only for the rich</p> <p>While there's a triangle and they're at the top</p> <p>This mess will never end</p> <p>It's not red and yellow that are truly enemies</p> <p>The color and the label are not the reason</p> <p>As long as many are sinking in poverty</p> <p>And justice is only for the rich</p> <p>While there's a triangle and they're at the top</p> <p>This mess will never end</p> <p>While there's a triangle and they're at the top</p> <p>This mess will never end</p> <p>This mess will never end</p>

The Marxist Theory of Karl Marx is reflected in this song. This simply serves to highlight how relevant his theory remains even after it has been developed for years. The song's lyrics, in particular, highlight the profound effects of classism on society.

In the Philippines, this situation is still present. The politicians in charge of the community will eventually be held accountable by their offspring. While their staff receive modest salaries, such businessmen will be in debt. While their tenants suffer from broken bones from working on the farm all day, farm owners will expand and create more goods in an attempt to get wealthy. Professionals with intelligence, skill, and talent frequently leave the Philippines because of the "Palakasan System," which prevents them from finding employment here. Social justice does not exist. In actuality, it upholds social prejudice, cultural values distortion, political favoritism, and economic hardship. What powerful individuals want to happen is determined by them. They can accomplish anything they desire with a single snap of their finger without considering the possibility of harming those around them. They just consider themselves. As Filipinos, we frequently observe how the wealthy are the only ones who can "afford" justice, while the wealthy and powerful mistreat the rest of the nation. Regarding the disparities that exist between people because of their lifestyle or social standing, it emphasizes that we should treat one another equally and refrain from treating someone differently based on their social standing; instead, we should view them as fellow Filipino citizens, regardless of their financial status. It's time for everyone to come together and change things.

II. METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is more than just a method; it's a critical lens through which we examine language use and its social impact. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) stems from a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice. Critical discourse analysis (or discourse analysis) is a research method for studying written or spoken language in relation to its social context. It aims to understand how language is used in real life situations (Lou, 2023).

A. Procedure in Collecting and Analyses Discourse

- The choice of text. When choosing a song, one should consider its background, societal relevance, and reception.
- The transcription. Play the song several times, paying attention to the changes in tone, rhythm, and supply.
- Close reading. Reading the words carefully can help you identify the main ideas, patterns, and symbols.
- Textual analysis. Discourse analysis is used in text analysis to look at language components, the sociocultural setting, and connections between texts.
- Interpretation. Determining a song's themes and messages might be aided by evaluating its emotional impact and meaning.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

"Tatsulok," a song by the Filipino rock band Bamboo, delves into the deep-seated issues of social inequality and systemic injustice prevalent in Philippine society. The title "Tatsulok," meaning "triangle" in Filipino, metaphorically represents the country's societal hierarchy, where a narrow elite sits at the apex, and the vast majority form the broad base. This triangular structure signifies the disproportionate distribution of wealth and power, leading to widespread poverty and marginalization of the majority.

Danger and Struggle. From the lyrics "Totoy bilisan mo bilisan mo ang takbo / Ilagan ang mga bombang nakatutok sa ulo mo". It emphasizes the constant threat faced by the marginalized and oppressed. The reference to bombs and running away suggests that the lower classes live in constant fear of violence and danger, which is an everyday struggle for survival. It mirrors real-world situations where oppressed communities live under constant threat.

The case of activist Reina Mae Nasino, who lost her infant daughter while in detention, highlights the dangers faced by marginalized individuals. Her experience underscores the struggles and systemic issues within the justice system (GMA Network, 2023).

Vulnerability of the Oppressed. From the lyrics "Totoy makinig ka wag kang magpa-gabi / Baka mapagkamalan ka't humandusay dyan sa tabi". Speaks to the vulnerability and fear that the oppressed feel. The fear of being mistaken for an enemy or a threat highlights the precarious existence of marginalized groups in an unjust society. This fear reflects the real-world experience of many impoverished individuals, who often face criminalization or mistreatment.

The Philippines' high Gini coefficient indicates significant income inequality, which contributes to the vulnerability of marginalized populations. This disparity often leads to unequal access to resources and opportunities, exacerbating social vulnerabilities (World Population Review, 2025).

This table provides an analysis of the themes, corresponding lyrics, and interpretation found in the song “Tatsulok (Triangle)” by Bamboo.

Table 1: Interpretation and Themes of the Song “Tatsulok (Triangle)” By Bamboo

Theme	Lyrics	Interpretation
Danger and Struggle	"Totoy bilisan mo bilisan mo ang takbo / Ilagan ang mga bombang nakatutok sa ulo mo"	The urgency and peril in the lyrics suggest a constant threat faced by the oppressed. It highlights the danger and struggles that come with being in the lower class.
Vulnerability of the Oppressed	"Totoy makinig ka wag kang magpagabi / Baka mapagkamalan ka't humandusay dyan sa tabi"	It warns the marginalized about being mistaken for threats or victims, showcasing the vulnerability and fear they live with in an unjust society.
Social Chaos and Inequality	"Totoy alam mo ba kung ano ang puno't dulo / Ng di matapos-tapos na kaguluhang ito"	The line hints at the root cause of continuous social unrest, which is the imbalance and division in society. The conflict seems unending due to systemic inequality.
Political and Social Divisions	"Hindi pula't dilaw tunay na magkalaban / Ang kulay at tatak ay di syang dahilan"	These lyric challenges the idea that political parties (symbolized by red and yellow) are the main cause of conflict, emphasizing that the real issue is social inequality.
Poverty and Lack of Justice	"Hangga't marami ang lugmok sa kahirapan / At ang hustisya ay para lang sa mayaman"	The lyric stresses the disparity between the rich and the poor, where the justice system benefits the wealthy while the poor continue to suffer.
Power Imbalance and Endless Conflict	"Hangga't marami ang lugmok sa kahirapan / At ang hustisya ay para lang sa mayaman"	The "tatsulok" (triangle) symbolizes the social pyramid where the powerful are at the top. The conflict will never end as long as the inequality persists.
Death and Destruction	"Iligtas ang hininga ng kay raming mga tao / At ang dating munting bukid ngayo'y sementeryo"	The lyric paints a bleak picture of widespread suffering and death, possibly due to the corrupt system, with land that was once fertile now being a cemetery.
Call for Change	"Totoy kumilos ka baliktarin ang tatsulok / Tulad ng dukha nailagay mo sa tuktok"	This is a call for revolution or change, urging the oppressed to flip the social hierarchy and take the place of the powerful at the top.
Challenge to Divide-and-Conquer Tactics	"Totoy kumilos ka baliktarin ang tatsulok / Tulad ng dukha nailagay mo sa tuktok"	This lyric challenges the divisive tactics used to distract people from the real problem—social and economic inequality—rather than political affiliations.

Social Chaos and Inequality. From the lyrics *“Totoy alam mo ba kung ano ang puno't dulo / Ng di matapos-tapos na kaguluhang ito”*. It directly points to the root causes of social unrest. The endless conflict reflects deep social inequalities and systemic issues that lead to constant turmoil. This theme suggests that without addressing the structural problems, the conflict will never end.

Despite economic growth, the Philippines continues to experience significant income inequality, contributing to social unrest. A 2022 World Bank report ranked the Philippines 15th out of 63 countries in terms of income inequality, highlighting persistent disparities (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2024).

Political and Social Divisions. From the lyrics *“Hindi pula't dilaw tunay na magkalaban / Ang kulay at tatak ay di syang dahilan”*. It challenges the idea that political divisions (symbolized by colors such as red and yellow) are the cause of social conflict. Instead, it asserts that the true issue lies in systemic inequality, not political colors or labels.

The acquittal of Reina Mae Nasino and her companions after years of detention reflects systemic biases and challenges within the justice system. Their case sheds light on the complexities of legal proceedings involving marginalized individuals (Philstar.com, 2023).

Poverty and Lack of Justice. From the lyrics *“Hangga't marami ang lugmok sa kahirapan / At ang hustisya ay para lang sa mayaman”*. It illustrates the stark contrast between the justice system benefiting the rich and leaving the poor to

suffer. This highlights the institutionalized inequality where the poor are often denied justice due to their socio-economic status.

The Philippines' aspiration to achieve upper middle-income status by 2025 raises concerns about losing access to concessional loans, potentially impacting poverty reduction efforts and social justice initiatives (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2024).

Power Imbalance and Endless Conflict. From the lyrics “Habang may tatsulok at sila ang nasa tuktok / Di matatapos itong gulo”. uses the “tatsulok” (triangle) to represent the social pyramid, where the powerful are at the top, and the conflict will persist as long as this structure remains unchanged. This theme stresses that the elite will continue to maintain control over the oppressed.

The Philippines' Gini coefficient of 40.70% in 2021 indicates substantial income inequality, which can lead to social unrest and highlight power imbalances within society (Oxford Academic, 2024).

Death and Destruction. From the lyrics “Iligtas ang hininga ng kay raming mga tao / At ang dating munting bukid ngayo'y sementeryo”. It paints a grim picture of widespread suffering and death, symbolizing the destructive consequences of social inequality. The imagery of once fertile land now being a cemetery suggests the physical and societal death caused by systemic oppression.

The tragic death of Baby River, the infant daughter of Reina Mae Nasino, while she was in detention, underscores the severe consequences of systemic failures and the harsh realities faced by marginalized individuals (GMA Network, 2023).

Call for Change. From the lyrics “Totoy kumilos ka baliktarin ang tatsulok / Tulad ng dukha nailagay mo sa tuktok”. It direct call for action, urging the oppressed to overturn the social hierarchy and change the power dynamics. This line symbolizes the desire for revolution and social change.

Ongoing discussions about addressing economic inequality in the Philippines emphasize the need for systemic reforms to promote inclusive growth and social justice (SSRN, 2025).

Challenges to Divide-and- Conquer Tactics. From the lyrics “Hindi pula't dilaw tunay na magkalaban / Ang kulay at tatak ay di syang dahilan”. It emphasizes that political divisions (red and yellow) are not the true source of conflict. This lyric urges the recognition of the deeper issue—class inequality and systemic oppression—rather than falling prey to divisive tactics.

Public sentiment in the Philippines increasingly recognizes the need for economic reforms to address systemic inequalities, challenging tactics that divide and distract from addressing root causes (Pew Research Center, 2025).

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Bamboo's song "Tatsulok" is an effective representation of the enduring political divisions, social injustices, and systemic inequalities that continue to influence the lives of marginalized communities worldwide. By using the "tatsulok" (triangle) as a metaphor, the song draws attention to the long-standing power structures that uphold the status quo, in which the oppressed fight at the bottom and the elite stay at the top. The study demonstrates that these themes are not merely theoretical ideas but rather have their roots in the sociopolitical realities of the Philippines, as evidenced by recent instances of human rights abuses, unequal access to the legal system, and the continuous fight for social change. The results highlight the significance of tackling these systemic problems and the urgent need for structural adjustments in order to promote a society that is more just and equal. In the end, Tatsulok is a call to action as well as a sociopolitical commentary, imploring people to oppose the current established power structures and strive toward a society that values equality, justice, and the empowerment of the underprivileged.

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