

The Creative Transformation of Public Criticism in Indonesia: A Ricoeurian Discourse Analysis of Kiky Saputri's Roasting Performance

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi kreatif kritik publik di Indonesia melalui studi kasus roasting yang dilakukan oleh komedian Kiky Saputri terhadap tokoh-tokoh politik dalam program televisi Lapor Pak. Dalam konteks sosial-politik yang ditandai oleh rendahnya toleransi terhadap kritik, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutik tiga tahap dari Paul Ricoeur - prafigurasi, konfigurasi, dan transfigurasi - untuk menganalisis bagaimana kritik politik dikemas ulang melalui humor dan narasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa roasting berfungsi sebagai strategi wacana yang menggeser kritik dari bentuk protes konfrontatif menjadi narasi yang memadukan satire, hiburan, dan keterlibatan publik. Transformasi ini sesuai dengan konsep otonomi semantik dari Ricoeur, di mana makna teks ditentukan oleh

pembacanya, bukan oleh penuturnya. Meskipun roasting membuka ruang bagi kritik yang kreatif, penelitian ini juga menemukan potensi depolitisasi karena kritik diserap ke dalam logika industri hiburan komersial. Dengan demikian, perubahan bentuk kritik menjadi konten media populer mencerminkan inovasi wacana sekaligus ketegangan ideologis dalam kehidupan publik Indonesia kontemporer.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the creative transformation of public criticism in Indonesia through the case study of comedian Kiky Saputri's roasting of political figures in the television program Lapor Pak. In a socio-political environment characterized by a low tolerance for dissent, the study applies Paul Ricoeur's three-stage hermeneutic model prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration to analyze how political critique is reshaped through humor and storytelling. The findings reveal that roasting serves as a discursive strategy that shifts criticism from confrontational protest to a narrative form that blends satire, entertainment, and public engagement. This transformation aligns with Ricoeur's concept of semantic autonomy, in which the meaning of a text is determined by its audience rather than its origin. While roasting opens a space for creative dissent, the study also identifies its potential for depoliticization as it becomes embedded within commercial entertainment logics. Thus, the transformation of criticism into popular media content reflects both discursive innovation and ideological tension in contemporary Indonesian public life.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Indonesian society, public criticism remains a fragile and contested practice. Despite the formal adoption of democratic institutions, critical voices are frequently delegitimized, criminalized, or framed as incitement under broad legal instruments such as the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law) (Saputra, 2021). Government officials and state institutions routinely display low tolerance toward dissent, blurring the boundary between free expression and subversion. This aversion to critique extends even into academic and cultural spaces, where politically charged research and performances are often met with suspicion or repression.

However, within the mediated landscape of social media and television entertainment, new forms of critical discourse have emerged. One such phenomenon is the practice of *roasting*, a comedic performance that blends satire, parody, and social commentary. In the Indonesian context, roasting as popularized by comedian Kiky Saputri on the program *Lapor Pak* functions as a paradoxical space where political critique is both articulated and neutralized through humor. While ostensibly entertaining, such performances serve as subtle yet potent vehicles for dissent, allowing critique to circumvent formal censorship through aesthetic mediation (Baym, 2005; Sørensen, 2013).

This article examines the transformation of public criticism from confrontational protest to a narrative-based, performative mode that is framed within entertainment discourse. The central question addressed here is how criticism, when recontextualized through humorous storytelling, gains discursive legitimacy in a socio-political environment that otherwise penalizes direct confrontation. To explore this, the study employs (Ricoeur, 1976) three-phase hermeneutic approach prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration as a theoretical lens to analyze the roasting performance directed at former Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan.

Ricoeur's theory of discourse emphasizes that human action and speech are not merely communicative events but textual entities that persist across time and audience contexts. His concept of semantic autonomy the idea that texts acquire new meanings when detached from their original authors and reinterpreted by new publics offers a powerful framework for understanding how political messages are reshaped in the entertainment arena (Ricoeur, 1976). This analysis, therefore, positions roasting not merely as comedy, but as a creative transformation of critique that operates within the overlapping terrains of media, politics, and cultural resistance. By locating this study at the intersection of media discourse, narrative theory, and critical hermeneutics, this article aims to contribute to emerging discussions on the ambivalent role of entertainment in shaping political subjectivities in semi authoritarian contexts.

The study of public criticism in contemporary media spaces requires a multidimensional theoretical lens that accounts for both symbolic structures and

sociopolitical constraints (Bruns, 2023; Fitriansyah & Aswan, 2024; Splichal, 2024). In authoritarian or semi-democratic regimes, where open protest is often discouraged, scholars have noted the increasing role of mediated satire and performative humor as vehicles for dissent (Gray et al., 2009; Sørensen, 2013). These practices ranging from political memes to stand-up comedy and roasting function as what (Baym, 2005) describes as “discursive integrations,” where entertainment and critique are hybridized to navigate hostile environments.

From a discourse-theoretical perspective, this phenomenon aligns with the concerns of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), particularly in analyzing how language is used to challenge, reproduce, or negotiate power relations (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 1993). CDS emphasizes the ideological functions of discourse and its embeddedness in social structures, including how humor may serve both as resistance and complicity within systems of domination (Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Recent studies have expanded these discussions into digital platforms. For example, (Highfield, 2018; Papacharissi, 2014) explore how digital storytelling and affective publics reshape political critique in networked environments. Similarly, (Phillips & Milner, 2021) argue that meme culture and digital satire provide new arenas for bottom-up contestation of elite discourse. In the Southeast Asian context, (Lim, 2018; Tapsell, 2017) show how online satire operates within the limits of state control, using humor to encode dissent that avoids direct confrontation. Other studies emphasize the emotional and affective power of political comedy in polarizing or mobilizing publics, as highlighted by (Day, 2011; Reilly, 2012), who analyze how satire is entangled with platform logics and cultural norms.

In addition to these perspectives, Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics offers a foundational philosophical framework for understanding discourse. (Ricoeur, 1976) conceptualizes a text as stabilized discourse, comprising three key elements: discourse, work, and fixation. Discourse, in this view, is the dialectic of event and meaning. While an event is ephemeral, its meaning is repeatable, translatable, and reconfigurable across contexts. The smallest unit of discourse is the sentence, which synthesizes the function of identification and predication. Ricoeur emphasizes the noetic-noematic nature of discourse meaning that it simultaneously expresses the speaker’s intention (noesis) and the reality being referred to (noema). Discourse is thus not merely linguistic output but a polyvalent act involving locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary, and interlocutionary dimensions (Austin, 1975). Objectively, meaning in discourse is the product of a dialectic between sense (the conceptual content within the discourse) and reference (the external reality it addresses). As (Heryanto et al., 1996) notes, language in this framework serves as a medium: between self and others (communication), self and the world (reference), and self with itself (self-understanding). While language systems are finite and closed, discourse opens up unlimited possibilities for expression and refiguration using limited resources.

To further interrogate the mechanics of this transformation, this study adopts Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics of discourse, a framework that views every human action as a potential text. (Ricoeur, 1976) articulates a triadic model: prefiguration (the culturally and symbolically pre-structured world of action), configuration (the emplotment and narrative articulation of events), and transfiguration (the interpretive reception and refiguration of meaning by new audiences). His notion of semantic autonomy is particularly crucial here, suggesting that once a discourse detaches from its authorial and cultural origins, it becomes open to reinterpretation, appropriation, and even subversion.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics, when synthesized with the ideological critique of CDS, allows us to explore not only what is being said in political humor but how and why such messages gain traction or resistance within particular publics. This dual approach provides the necessary tools to analyze roasting as a dynamic form of mediated criticism that can shift political narratives without invoking direct confrontation. In the Indonesian context, where criticism is often punished and political sensitivities are high, such mediated performances are not merely entertainment they are strategic forms of symbolic negotiation. Comedy, in this setting, is less about punchlines than it is about navigating the edge of what can and cannot be said.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive approach grounded in (Ricoeur, 1976) three-stage hermeneutic model of discourse analysis namely prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration. Ricoeur's framework is particularly suited to this research, as it theorizes human action and narrative as interwoven texts that can be interpreted across shifting audiences and temporalities. The analysis focuses on a single case study: the roasting performance of Kiky Saputri directed at former Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan in the television program *Lapor Pak* (aired November 2021 on Trans7). The case was selected through purposive sampling based on its virality (8.7 million YouTube views) and the political salience of its target figure.

Data sources include the transcript of the roasting performance, along with supporting audience responses retrieved from YouTube comments, TikTok reposts, and related social media discourses. The discourse was analyzed in three phases: Prefiguration: Identifying socio-political scripts, actor positions, and symbolic referents embedded in the performance. Configuration: Tracing the narrative architecture, joke structures, and sequencing of critique. Transfiguration: Interpreting how the roasting text produces meaning across divergent audience horizons, generating both reinforcement and rupture of political subjectivities. This interpretive reading is complemented by a critical discourse perspective, particularly informed by (Ricoeur, 1976) notion of semantic autonomy, which allows the tracing of meaning detachment from authorial intent and cultural origins.

RESULT

Kiky Saputri's Roasting of Anies Baswedan began with a sharp and provocative opening.

"We have a very special guest today, a great leader, please give a big round of applause for... Mr. Ahok," said Kiky Saputri (2021).

"And he coughs Ahok ahok ahok," added Andika.

Anies did not remain silent and responded to the *roast* with a laugh:

"Your acting is quite impressive," he said, pointing at Kiky.

Kiky replied:

"Well, of course you know this is just comedy, just to entertain your haters. There's no way I wouldn't know DKI 1, Mr. H. Anies Rasyid Baswedan, SE, MPP, Ph.D."

"Is your Ph.D. currently on a promo tour, sir?"

"But honestly, I'm really happy to meet you today, Mr. Anies."

"You're happy, I'm the one panicking," Wendi chimed in.

"The threat is the contract gets terminated," added Kiky.

She continued:

"Meeting a governor is not like meeting an ordinary person—the greeting is different. When I meet Mr. Andika: 'How's the family?' Normal. Mr. Wendi: 'How are the kids?' Normal. But with a governor, it's not so normal. It's like: 'Mr. Anies, how's Formula E?'"

Anies, laughing and pointing to Kiky, replied:

"So when Formula E comes, are you all going to watch? You get tickets? You do? No?"

Kiky then said:

"But I give my full respect to Mr. Anies, who became one of the youngest rectors in Indonesia. Thanks to his brilliance, he was appointed Minister of Education and Culture in 2014. Is that right, sir? Though eventually, he was reshuffled. That's okay, right? Most people don't know that when he was reshuffled, President Jokowi offered him another position but Mr. Anies didn't take it. Why, sir? Were you not ready to be fired twice?"

"But it's okay. There is no result that betrays the process. And now we see Mr. Anies standing as Governor of Jakarta, with so many programs, so many policies... and so many critics."

"Good thing I got reshuffled imagine if I hadn't," Anies joked.

Kiky responded:

"But Mr. Anies, I actually disagree with all the criticism. In the public's eyes, you're always blamed especially about the floods. Even though floods existed long before you took office, right? Flood? Blame Anies. More floods? Still Anies' fault. It got so bad that Mr. Anies said: 'Floods can write letters in a day, and I can control the rain.' That's when I realized Mr. Anies isn't a governor, he's the Avatar, master of water."

"So many people close their eyes, or look down on Mr. Anies. But they ignore the amazing things he's accomplished—like building the Jakarta International Stadium. The biggest and most luxurious sports arena in the city, built to international standards. But that's what people don't see."

"Sir, if you can build such a magnificent stadium, why is it so hard to build the public's trust? You should be able to, right?"

"To be honest, sir, I prepared a full one-hour *roast* for you. But I only delivered a small part—didn't finish it. Just like your programs—many remain unfinished."

At the end of the performance, as they shook hands, Anies said:

"Mercy! Andre, her hands are freezing."

DISCUSSION

Prefiguration: Critique in a Hostile Political Culture

The roasting performance by Kiky Saputri directed at Anies Baswedan unfolds within a socio-political context marked by low tolerance toward criticism. In Ricoeur's terms, this context constitutes the prefigured world—a symbolic structure of action where dissent is culturally discouraged and often criminalized (Ricoeur, 1976). As (Saputra, 2021) has noted, critical voices in Indonesia are frequently suppressed under legal instruments such as the ITE Law, and even academic research is not exempt from surveillance or censorship.

Kiky's roasting emerges as a strategic intervention into this prefigured landscape. It appropriates the genre of televised comedy to insert critical narratives that would otherwise risk political retaliation if delivered directly. Her humor references culturally and politically charged issues—such as the controversial Jakarta floods, Formula E racing event, and Anies Baswedan's political trajectory—framed in ways that allow multiple interpretations. This aligns with (van Dijk, 1993) view that discourse in constrained environments often relies on implicature and ambiguity as protective mechanisms.

Configuration: Narrative Architecture and Discursive Masking

Through Ricoeur's second hermeneutic phase, configuration, the roasting text reveals a deliberate narrative structure. The critique is emploted through a series of juxtaposed

segments—praise followed by subversive punchlines. For instance, Kiky opens with exaggerated praise: “We are honored to welcome a great leader... let’s give a big round of applause for Ahok,”—only to subvert expectations by referencing a political rival of Anies. This technique, commonly known in comedy as the bait-and-switch, exemplifies how narrative form is used to disguise and deliver critique under the guise of humor.

Such configuration is not arbitrary. As per (Ricoeur, 1976), narrative reorders temporality and causality, transforming fragmented facts into coherent plotlines. In Kiky’s narrative, Anies’ past (reshuffle from the education ministry), present (Formula E), and projected future (trust deficit) are connected through ironic storytelling. In this process, the roasting becomes a politically charged text that both entertains and challenges dominant perceptions—what (Fairclough, 2013) refers to as “discursively constructing social reality.”

Transfiguration: Audience Horizons and Political Ambiguity

The third phase, transfiguration, refers to the way the audience receives and interprets the text. In the case of Kiky’s roasting, audience responses—on YouTube, TikTok, and other platforms—demonstrate divergent readings. For supporters of Anies, the performance may be interpreted as light-hearted banter that showcases his openness to criticism. For critics, it affirms his political shortcomings, especially when Kiky remarks: “I had prepared a full one-hour set, but only delivered a bit—just like your programs, many remain unfinished.”

Here, Ricoeur’s concept of semantic autonomy becomes evident. The meaning of the roasting is no longer anchored to the performer’s intent or the original socio-political context, but instead shaped by interpretive communities (Baktir, 2018). As (Wodak & Meyer, 2001) argue, discourse is inherently ideological, and its reception is filtered through audience predispositions, power relations, and media frames.

Notably, the performance allows for a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1979), where viewers project their own political imaginations onto the narrative. The comic ambiguity permits both critique and praise, thereby softening potential backlash while still introducing subversive messages. This discursive ambiguity is precisely what gives the roasting its political efficacy in a restrictive environment.

The Commodification of Critique: Between Resistance and Co-optation

While the performance opens space for public discourse, it is not without complications. The staging of critique within a commercial entertainment format introduces what could be termed a commodification of dissent. As (Gray et al., 2009) observe, political satire in mass media often risks becoming depoliticized through its alignment with audience ratings, sponsor interests, and celebrity cultures.

This raises a critical question: is the roasting a form of resistance or a co-opted spectacle? Ricoeur’s model allows for both readings. On one hand, the performance offers a

creative reconfiguration of critique that challenges dominant narratives. On the other, its placement within a commercially driven TV format risks reducing political dissent to momentary amusement—a phenomenon echoed in (Chouliaraki, 2017) analysis of “ironic spectatorship.” Yet, even within this commodified space, the roasting carries subversive potential. As (Ricoeur, 1976) insists, interpretation is never fixed; the text remains open to reconfiguration by new publics. Thus, the performance may plant seeds of critical reflection, even if its immediate effect appears diluted.

Table 1: Schematic of Paul Ricoeur's discourse analysis

Ricoeurian Stage	Analytical Focus	Observations
Prefiguration	Political culture & constraints	Public criticism is risky; <i>roasting</i> emerges as a strategic workaround.
Configuration	Narrative emplotment & genre	Critique is framed through irony, praise, punchlines, and storytelling.
Transfiguration	Audience reception & ideological ambiguity	Meaning diverges across publics; critique is both enabled and diluted.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the creative transformation of public criticism in Indonesia through an in-depth discourse analysis of Kiky Saputri's roasting performance targeting Anies Baswedan. Using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework—prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration—in combination with principles from Critical Discourse Studies, the analysis revealed how mediated humor operates as a double-edged discourse: both a space for critique and a site of potential depoliticization.

The roasting exemplifies a strategic adaptation of dissent in a socio-political climate that discourages open criticism. It transforms critique from confrontational protest into an aesthetically mediated performance that is both culturally resonant and ideologically charged. Through narrative composition and symbolic play, the roasting reconfigures controversial political events into digestible and entertaining segments, allowing critical discourse to reach broader publics without direct confrontation.

The study also demonstrated that while such performances may subvert dominant narratives, they are not immune to co-optation. Situated within the logics of commercial entertainment, these critiques are often filtered through audience expectations, platform algorithms, and media gatekeeping. Nonetheless, as Ricoeur argues, meaning is never fixed.

The semantic autonomy of the text allows it to be reinterpreted, contested, and even radicalized by future audiences.

In this sense, the transformation of criticism into narrative humor does not signal its disappearance, but rather its migration into alternative discursive forms. Roasting, when viewed through this lens, is neither trivial nor purely comedic—it is a cultural practice that navigates the boundaries of speech, power, and public imagination. As such, it offers a compelling example of how creative expression can perform critical functions in constrained political environments. Future research may explore how different publics engage with these performances across social media platforms, or compare similar forms of mediated critique in other illiberal or hybrid regimes. This would deepen our understanding of how narrative, humor, and politics continue to evolve in the digital public sphere.

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